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By Nalbro Bartley

Up and Coming
Judd & Judd

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BY

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CHAPTER I

THAT she was a home loving but not home baking individual was Blair's conclusion, despite the honeymoon glamour of Twilddo, the three room apartment, and Tony's tribute as to her being the world's tenth wonder!

While ashamed of simmering discontent, Blair resented the influx of company which invariably stayed for dinner. She was not sufficient wonder to avoid a shiny nose and a stupid brain from necessary kitchen work. She found herself thinking that Anthony Judd never struggled with a refractory or dishonest cleaning woman, a roast resembling a leather cushion, the mystery of light pie crust. Tony could tell his aunt (thank fortune she was his only close relative) when to stop advising and commenting—Blair could not. Yet Blair appreciated the older woman's interest, emphasized by these reiterated

facts: "You have no mother, my dear. It seems to me college fits girls for one thing—to have their own way. The women in the Judd family have always been famous cooks."

Aunt Agnes Judd's old fashioned presence, disapproving of their entire college romance, added to Tony's ever hungry one, seemed to crowd out Blair's individual place in the firmament.

She felt harassed. It was an effort to remember that her genial but short sighted father and Aunt Agnes were "sweetie heirlooms" and "nice old fossils" as Tony and she once agreed. But this was before she was Tony's housekeeper.

She found herself recalling her father's wonderings as to what Blair's mid-Victorian mother would have said to an attractive yet strong minded daughter who had majored in finance and advertising only to marry a classmate with similar qualifications? All very well for Tony, her father had protested, a man had to have a sheepskin these days if he wanted to get away with things; no other means unless he "grew side whiskers and started to paint caviar." But a girl—there was both doubt and dissatisfaction in his mind. Having sold her father the idea of a college education, he was secretly disappointed to see her exchange the diploma for a

marriage certificate while his son-in-law retained both.

Having gone into the kitchen while Tony went into the office, Blair was beginning to wonder why she had ever taken the time and trouble to train for the latter? It had been Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Judd who enjoyed the Hot Springs honeymoon but it was Judd and wife who took up life at the Gramatan apartments, an imposing structure (if viewed from the front) wherein many families deluded themselves that they were enjoying home life.

Absorbed in valentine happiness, neither Judd nor wife realized this transition in title. Their pooled and energetic ambitions, which already included a dignified semi-country home, regarded this apartment merely as a "Twilldo." Better this than a long drawn out engagement. Contrary to Aunt Agnes, who felt young people should buy their furniture for eternity before presuming to marry, Blair and Tony held that one could start housekeeping these days with a parchment lamp shade and a brace of can openers.

Tony had had no need to learn the multitude of new and bewildering things which caused his wife to forget the old and interesting ones. During the first weeks, Blair wondered how Tony would have re-

acted had he stayed home to wash dishes, clean the ice box, pound round steak into pretending it was porterhouse, wash out silk things (no lady trusts them to any laundry, Aunt Agnes had remarked), arrange pantry shelves, listen to the culinary tastes of one's life partner, supply a cabinet of home remedies, make a comprehensive survey of the prices and merits of various stores—and not let the disadvantages of the apartment become annoying, say the cluttered fire-escapes, the community washlines, the disorderly tradesmen's alley, the necessity to bait mouse traps!

For an antidote, she suggested to Tony that he tell her of business. But Tony was “fed up on shop,” he defended, it was a blessed relief to come to Twilldo and find Blair in a bronzed silk gown, his ring on her finger, his aunt's food on the little dining room table. He wanted to relax, it would be impossible to tell Blair the details of his day unless she were in the office with him, able to comprehend intelligently when he mentioned a certain contract or employee.

Blair felt rebuffed. She, who understood Tony's work in the advertising agency as far as theory was concerned, would have welcomed the stimulus.

“I like to shut a mental door on the whole darned

office," Tony insisted, "would any man want to come home to talk business when he can look at you?"

It was still the honeymoon so Blair did not press the point. But she consoled herself with the thought that, if the occasion arose, they could talk business and with mutual benefit. Had it not been Blair Norcross and Anthony Judd, in the junior advertising contest, who won the prize due to their efficient team work? Their posters and booklets had attracted outside attention to the extent that Tony's present position could be traced to this undergraduate achievement! Then it had been brain and brain—not heart to heart!

But this did not help her when Polly Arnold, her ravishing and sometimes rouged classmate, came to eat up her tea cakes and confide that Bill Farnsworth would call later. This meant Bill would appear to play horrible discords on her piano, make love to Polly—and stay to dinner as a "surprise for that miserable old married man."

Blair would loot her ice box while Polly played at setting the table. After the fashion of housekeepers, Blair protested it was more trouble to have a helper in her kitchenette than to do things herself, so she would wash the dishes, empty that damnable

ice box pan, put the to-morrow's ticket in the moist milk bottle, hang up the cards for the ice man and baker, bait the mouse trap and set out the breakfast china on a tray to save time in the morning. As she discarded her apron, she would long to go to bed instead of playing bridge and accompaniments for Polly.

Nor could Polly understand why Blair did not take part in the Garret Club French play. But Blair chose to go with Tony; she felt sedate, almost sluggish as she watched her friends present *The Misanthrope*.

Her former chum, Roxanna Hubbell, was also annoying. Roxy, who was on an independent schedule and regarded men and fancy work as inventions of the devil, had been admitted to the bar and was in the employ of a conservative firm which was both shocked yet impressed by her. Long ago, Roxy abandoned her "polite, white kid gloved family" to live in a bachelor girl's flat. She had taken to mannish dress and a scraggly terrier in her freshman year. Her personality was so clever and crystallized that even those who ridiculed her prophesied a brilliant future. Roxy was pardonably conceited, well aware people looked after her when she walked downtown. She was addicted to

cigarettes, goodlooking neckties, *vers libre*. Her thin, clearcut face with its clipped, dark hair and her swaggering walk were as well known as the civil war monument. Roxy had tried hard to induce Blair to join the serious minded sisterhood but Blair had been proven immune.

After Blair's marriage, Roxy considered herself as being responsible for Blair's contacts with the outside world. Therefore, she tumbled into Twilldo at any and all hours. Say two a.m.—after a midnight court session—because she wanted “clothes for a nice kid needing a boost, I'll take them to the matron—I couldn't ask the kid to wear my regimentals. I know you won't fail me!” Here, Roxy lit a cigarette and strummed on the piano to Tony's everlasting indignation. But Blair, half asleep, bundled some clothes into a bag, told Roxy she was impossible and kissed her goodbye in amused forgiveness.

Roxy was apt to interrupt their Sundays—a day devoted to mongrel jobs such as clothes pressing, shampoos, light carpentry. Blair had surrendered her Sundays to Tony. Before marriage, Tony devoted his Sundays to Blair.

Things had blurred after the first months of marriage. Blair's personal reactions became confused with her decision as to the best furniture polish, how

to treat the claim agent from the hand laundry which had spirited away an underslip, the real reason Tony refused to eat her meat loaf! Her brain cells needed recharging, she complained to Tony, who answered any protest with a kiss.

Moreover their expenses worried Blair to the extent that when asked to be chairman of the Garret Club programme committee, she refused and with regret. Not only the time needed for the committee but the money necessary for informal entertaining were her reasons. Blair was realizing that it was absurd to try making two plus two equal five or even four and a half, which was what they had done since they came to live at Twilldo. Neither Tony nor Blair had felt the gray wolf or the prancing peacock at their door. They were neither avaricious nor wasters. Interesting ideas were as intriguing as jazzmania, a good book was a friend, proper clothes were inconsequential after a certain point, up to that point they were a necessity the same as attending a certain number of concerts, class reunions, possessing reliable fountain pens. They preferred congenial people to moneyed, bizarre personalities. Their discrimination had a tendency to superiority. Perhaps this was due to the esoteric result of a liberal university education. Life had been theoretically

analyzed in mellowed, somewhat altruistic terms. True, experience was yet to be had and experience and theory are oftentimes polarities. Yet life, *per se*, could neither bully nor nauseate these young people whose intentions were to prove that life is a thing to be enjoyed quite as much as to be improved.

The day following Blair's refusal as chairman, she decided to ignore telephone and speaking tube and secure the day for herself. After the usual kitchen routine, her programme was to include a cold cream facial, a hair wave, a self inflicted manicure—thus saving two dollars—remodelling a trousseau frock for an ad club dance, a summary of her own and Tony's backgrounds and the creating of a financial system which would meet the necessary Judd expenditures! Then she would do an article on juvenile book advertising; she wanted Tony's trade journal to print it. Having planned it for days, she would be able to set it down via her typewriter in less than an hour. Heaven bless her generous father who had given her the portable machine two summers ago!

By two o'clock, Blair was ready to summarize backgrounds.

CHAPTER II

BLAIR'S mother had died when she was twelve. After which breaking up of the conventional home, Blair went to a city boarding school, her vacations being spent with cousins at the shore or joining her father, who travelled for an importing house, on the road.

Blair's had been the well bred, unchaperoned freedom of many American girls, the sort who use rouge when they like or don knickers and vanish for a week-end hike. During her freshman year, she had been considered a trifle too hearty. When rushed for a sorority, she was almost blackballed because she ate the foundation lettuce leaves of her salad. In her sophomore year, she attempted social service work, did holiday clerking, visited in Greenwich village. Previous to the junior advertising contest, she had a normal case of flapperitis with cutey complications during which she wore a tweed cape, sandals, learned barefoot dancing and to shake dice.

Tony had been raised by his mother and his

father's sister but he had done much to live it down. Like Blair, he considered himself a deep, independent thinker and killed any hope of becoming a missionary long before finishing high school. Tony prided himself on being an agnostic, he was to go in for fiction which should be a blend of de Maupassant and Nietzsche but he abandoned the idea during his freshman year due to premature efforts. In sophomore and junior years, he was prominent as an athletic star, known as a "non-queener"; his aim was to create a sulphuric advertising agency which would result in his being New York's millionaire but cynical bachelor! During this time, Blair flitted across his consciousness only in the form of a business rival, the unwilling admission that it was as much her brain as his which won them the junior contest—too bad, she was a girl. Otherwise he might have proposed taking her into his agency.

Not until their junior vacation did these dauntless egotists meet at the Maine coast where followed a spontaneous surrender of hearts and fraternity pins. Thereupon, the senior year became a glorified space of time, unengaged classmates regarding them with awe and envy. Mental team work gave way to mutual adoration.

Following graduation, Blair accepted a position

as secretary in an iron foundry office—Tony was given a chance with the town's largest advertising agency. Blair remained in the position long enough to buy her trousseau and demonstrate, so she believed, that she was self-supporting!

Despite the fact that to marry two weeks after Christmas was anything but customary, they arranged for as simple a wedding as possible, refusing Roxy's plea for a justice of the peace and Aunt Agnes' longing for white satin and a veil. This marriage ceremony seemed merely incidental. They wanted to begin creating their own home, the right, as Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Davenport Judd, to be let alone. Tradition fretted them just as the future fascinated, love obscured humdrum reality. They felt themselves supreme sentimentalists as they stood in the hotel parlor to condescendingly repeat the minister's phrases.

Blair was convinced all was right with the world. Her father's life as a successful travelling man had no need of her efforts. She was resolved to be tender and considerate of Tony's aunt. She might have regretted her mother but for the paramount happiness of the present. She felt competent to be Mrs. Anthony Judd due to her commonsense, sturdy outlook on life. Tony was bound to be a super

husband, they agreed in every possible matter from immortality of the soul down to salad dressing—poor Roxy! Why did she rail against marriage, take a bachelor flat? What could Polly see in Bill Farnsworth? What a pity everyone was not married to a Tony Judd!

Besides, their marriage differed from many marriages, so Blair was convinced. She shared with Tony mystical proof that theirs was a partnership of the very soul. (Blair was unconscious of lurid descriptives, she was somewhat overwhelmed with the evidence that their marriage was never to be laid aside.)

Tony, too, revered this secret proof, agreeing that the sceptical world must have no chance to scoff at the amazing incident.

Just before their engagement, when Blair asked herself if she was sure Tony Judd would be the right man and Tony drew Blair's initials in the sand, proof had been given them.

Leaving Blair bent on a picnic party, Tony had gone to a classmate's camp, three miles in the opposite direction. During the stag luncheon, he experienced the sensation of Blair's calling to him. Material details about him blurred into a fog out of which emerged Blair's figure, helpless, in danger, her

hands outstretched. After a moment of hesitation, Tony found himself asking for the loan of the flivver, making some hasty excuse about forgetting to meet a train.

Calling himself all sorts of an idiot, he found himself following an unused mud road. Driving recklessly, he wondered if he was turning queer—far better it happened before Blair had promised to marry him—were there any Judds who had been mentally awry? Presently, he found himself drawing up beside a stone fence, picking his way across the pastures and into the woods. He did not question whether or not this was the picnic ground or whether he would be laughed at—or locked up. These seemed beside the issue. Some impelling yet not unpleasant force seemed to push him ahead, made him turn here—there—until he looked up at a ragged rim of rock and tree roots to which Blair was clinging! Most surprising had been his calm satisfaction at knowing he had not been victim of an unsteady brain.

With quick assurance, he climbed up to rescue her, realizing Blair was so much his that they had been permitted one glorified instant of contact with the forces most people spend their lives trying to elude or deny!

As he drew her to safety, she said: "I knew you would come—I am not hurt—not even hysterical. I saw flowers over the ledge—I didn't gauge the distance and when I lost balance, all I could do was to catch hold something and just manage to hang on. I knew you'd come—because we loved each other. Don't ask me why—I knew it."

"The picnic—" he had whispered.

"Given up because Diane's sister came and they wanted to visit while they unpacked. I went for a consoling hike. But Tony—how did you know where I was?" The strangeness of the thing frightened her. "It seems so simple yet overpowering—and when you try putting it into words, so silly!"

"It means that we belong to each other," Tony whispered, "we can't translate this into everyday terms—nor must we try. It means that we belong."

"A sort of cosmic wireless," Blair had added, "a holy of holies we were allowed to listen in on—perhaps only once in a lifetime. It was our message—no, we must never tell anyone."

With an effort, Blair roused herself from the thrill of this memory to take into practical consideration the Judd finances!

The rent for Twilldo was sixty-five a month, with

a dollar tip to both janitor and hall boy. Total—sixty-seven. Their food budget seemed obese, despite Aunt Agnes' contributions. Tony scorned leftovers. Blair admitted her extravagance. Many strange culinary messes had been dispatched with secrecy down the dumb waiter. Once, she had thrown away perfectly good cream because it would not whip! Another time, she used poultry seasoning in a lamb stew—a third offense was a cake made with baking soda instead of powder. These shameful deeds confronted her as, pencil in hand, she estimated the food budget, inclusive of ice, was fifty-two dollars monthly, her cleaning woman, a heavy handed Slav with a penchant for afternoon tea, was twelve dollars and forty cents more. The rough dry laundry, Blair ironing it herself, came to eight dollars, and the telephone three fifty, light and gas about seven. Fortunately, Blair's wardrobe and the household supplies needed no replenishing for the total of the current expenses was, her lips puckering in disapproval, one hundred forty nine dollars and ninety cents—with ten cents on the side for scouring powder! Tony's salary was two hundred and twenty-five dollars, a splendid beginning for a chap not quite twenty-four. True, he earned it and fully expected a bonus if things went as he hoped for,

but two hundred and twenty-five a month was all they could count on having.

One hundred and fifty from two hundred and twenty-five left seventy-five dollars. Tony had life insurance, club expenses and personal laundry to meet, he walked to and from the office, bless him, and he agreed to take but thirty of the remaining seventy-five and to give Blair thirty for pin money. The remaining fifteen must be their minute but necessary nest egg. Blair's father had given them a handsome check which had furnished the apartment. Tony had saved little due to an extravagant courtship, joining the ad club, buying his own "trousseau." The Judds had but three hundred dollars in the bank to which the monthly fifteen was to be added with the solemnity of a rite.

Thirty dollars pocket money—out of which Blair paid car fare or an occasional taxi, incidentals, amusements, charity contributions—it was not overly much. But it was still less for Tony with his business and life insurance obligations. Sensibly, she reflected upon the financial standing of their relatives. Aunt Agnes had an annuity, her old fashioned house in the downtown section was heavily mortgaged. She refused to sell her home, there were sentimental memories con-

nected with every foot of the soil—even to the strip of land where her three pet dogs had been buried, wrapped in monogrammed bath towels! Blair believed Tony's aunt should remain unmolested. She considered it a most satisfactory state of affairs that Tony's aunt was self supporting and that Tony was to expect no financial benefits from her. She smiled as she thought of her extravagant, bald headed, nervous father who wasted his money as he did his vitality. Blair cherished no illusions concerning him. His bank account no sooner thrived than it began to dwindle.

Therefore, it was urgent, in order to have a real home and the family they wanted, that Tony advance in business and Blair help by conserving. She would make her first burnt offering by insisting he take fifteen of her thirty dollars allowance. He could appear more affluent, take a street car one way, well she knew that he was tired when he came in at night. Besides, daily walks prevented Sunday tramps. When they were engaged that was different, Tony was enduring the hardships of conquest.

He might play golf—Blair's elastic conception of the additional pocket money and Tony's brilliant future were interrupted by Tony's sudden appearance.

"Blair, have you been all right?" he demanded, taking her in his arms.

"You goose—and why not?"

"Tried three times to get you on the wire. My dear little girl, don't you realize how I worry if I even think anything is wrong with you?"

Blair's eyes were a happy blue. "How nice that sounds—to have you worry because you could not get me on a telephone."

"But you had said you would be here all day, no interruptions allowed. I couldn't understand your not answering me. I've something important to tell you. I'm going to New York tonight—for the auto show. Ferguson, who always does it, is held on an important contract in Omaha—so the firm gave me the chance. I wanted to tell you first of all. I taxied home, yes, really—with visions of your fainting over the cookstove or tobogganing off the fire escape—darling, you should have answered," he was kissing her as he spoke.

"Be sensible, how could I know it was you telephoning? Besides," in a serious voice, "had it been urgent, you would have known. You would have listened in—never doubt our 'wireless,' Tony."

"True enough. But," with boyish eagerness, "I don't disturb you?"

"No," a trifle slowly. "I've the nicest thing to tell you—I've decided to give you an extra fifteen dollars a month for pocket money—how does that compare with the firm's praises?" She explained the budget.

Drawing her on his knee, Tony studied it for a moment. "You're a wonder," he conceded, "I wish Aunt Agnes was here to overhear. I call this proof of a trained mind—but I don't want the extra money. It is yours—I wish it were five hundred."

"That is what counts—attitude," she insisted, her lips pressing his cheek, "it means everything to have you feel so. Fifteen dollars more will help you make so much money that someday I can have the five hundred—who knows? I may have a rope of pearls yet! For now, use the extra money. I've no need for it—I sha'n't need clothes for ever so long and I'm not going to be chairman of the Garret Club committee. Your clubs are enough for me. Don't you see how much I trust you?"

After a half hour of mutual admiration, Tony packed for the evening train. He disliked going without Blair, if only for a few days. She must meet him on his return and they would celebrate with dinner downtown, hang the expense! And—would she loan him the portable typewriter? She

had no idea what a useful thing it would be, he could eliminate hotel stenographers and do stuff up in his room—he wanted his reports to make the firm take notice of his style. That was splendid of her—she always understood.

After Blair waved goodbye, she realized, almost embarrassed at her sense of defeat, that the article on juvenile book advertising was still in her brain, the portable typewriter in Tony's berth—but of course, she was very happy!

She would do the article in longhand, she would have so much time while Tony was gone. But she reached the Gramatan to find Roxy waiting downstairs.

"I'm here to be doctored up," Roxy explained, "got a beastly cold. One of the office men told me Tony was going to New York—so I came straight to you. I'd have chosen a hospital only the babies' wails penetrate every wall. If I went home, I'd be prayed over. I'm woozy and weak and my head feels like granite and my throat devastated by a porcupine. I must be fit by Thursday—a big case is called—help me, child, won't you?"

So Roxy tumbled into bed to be nursed until the wire from Tony caused her to be unceremoniously deposed. During which interval, Blair learned that

even liberated women who laugh at home ties and delight in massacring tradition, can be as fretsome and fearsome as the spineless ones upon whom these free lance philosophers delight to bear down.

Tony arrived jubilant, enthusiastic—extremely hungry.

“Don’t ask what I did or said or saw,” he begged, “I’m satiated with slick metropolis skin games, up-state bounders cutting up where their neighbors can’t see them, self-made personages handing out rolled cabbage leaves and expecting you to act as if they were coronas. I want to look at you and listen to you talk and realize what a lucky guy I am.”

Blair thrilled at the homage. But the next day, she found that Tony had left her typewriter on his desk! Had he acquired it, too, as well as the additional pocket money?

CHAPTER III

It was April before Blair met any of the Gramatan tenants. The months at Twilldo had been so engrossing that she had not reflected upon the unfriendliness of the apartment house.

It had been satisfactory until spring suggested itself. The first, cloying, sunny day with the muddy lawns decorated by blackened snow patches in the sunless corners, the wind like a swashbuckling herald of what was to follow, millinery windows, the florist's display of violets and daffodils in dull green jars, the old horseradish vendor re-appearing on the corner—all this and the fact that fifteen dollars a month pin money does not provide an Easter outfit inspired Blair with a noble discontent.

She did not want to shop with Aunt Agnes, she was glad her father was off on a long trip and Roxy, with co-workers, had gone to Bermuda. Blair became reckless to the extent of buying six jonquils and an overly ripe avacado. Getting out her wardrobe in order to decide what should be remodelled, she was reminded of Polly's new and expensive

finery. Polly, not on speaking terms with Bill for the time being, had gone to her married sister in Chicago. Bill, nursing a grieved heart and working overtime to buy the engagement ring, did not drop in at Twilldo. Tony lunched with him frequently, he said, and kept up with what was stirring.

It seemed to Blair that Tony lunched with so many persons and thus kept up with what was stirring that he did not consider it necessary to re-tell Blair. He preferred returning home to bask in her wifely affection, an infantile monster who was irritable if domestic details were awry or Blair unable to devote herself to him. Tony argued this was proof of an engrossing love, he cared for no one as he did for Blair—the longer they were married, the more he wanted her complete attention—did this mean nothing?

It meant a great deal, she had answered politely, concealing her thoughts. Only, she, too, would liked to have known “what was stirring.” She wearied of mild tea parties, conventional calls and she had voluntarily become passive in her club work. There were newspapers, truly, but Blair had any trained mind’s contempt for headlines. She wanted to be part of the warp and woof of world progress. Tony did not ask her to read proof on his articles

any longer and once, before the spring fever, he said emphatically :

“Stop suggesting how I handle my contracts—my dear girl, how could you be a competent critic?”

Her hands white from biscuit making, Blair vigorously plied the overfloured dough to a board-like consistency. “I think I understand your work,” she had begun.

“Truly—theoretically—but you’ve never done anything but play around as secretary with your mind on buying a tortoise shell toilet set—and marrying me! You’ve been such a wonderful wife, you couldn’t have given attention to outside things.”

“Admitted,” she said, with a vicious jab at the dough, “but has advertising revolutionized itself inside of six months?”

“No. But were I to try to explain each detail of my work, the personality and circumstances influencing every order, our treatment of the same—oh, have a heart, Blair. Don’t you think a ten-hour grind is sufficient? Particularly, when a man wants to come home to you?” He kissed the nape of her white neck with its tempting fluff of curls. “Come on, lovely, don’t try to do my job and yours too. Forget business—let’s go to the movies tonight—an awfully good comedy, they tell me.”

Blair was obliged to discard the biscuits as a result of emotional kneading. Tony was right, she reproved herself, he needed contrast, she must understand. So she went to the movies and endured the horseplay comedy, was faintly thrilled by the world scenes and the operatic overture—and returned home convinced that no matter what Tony appeared to be at his office, he was seldom older than sixteen years when with her! She lay awake, wondering why this had not been apparent before, she had regarded Tony as a tower of strength, a dynamic, matured personality which should leave its mark on the world. Now, she felt many years his senior despite her twenty-three birthdays.

But spring fever brought symptoms of youth once more. Blair donned a blue silk dress with a silver lace sash, curled her hair, selected a cushion and went out to become established on the fire escape. She pretended the other fire escapes were non-existent. Neither did she consider the flapping wash in the courtyard nor the rattle of ash cans being dragged in and out. She was determined to see poetry in her surroundings. She had taken a pad and pencil besides a copy of her favorite Lamb's Essays. Blair was bent upon being inspired!

Sometimes, "songs came to her" although she had

little musical training. All morning, there had suggested itself a stirring, sacred melody—The Sword Song from Ezekiel, she would call it. If it developed itself, she would have it harmonized. By the time she had written the first bars, she wondered how it would seem to create a successful melody, have royalty checks float in as frequently as did bills.

“The sword—the sword—” she hummed, leaning against the iron rails. The fire escape was a grated balcony overlooking a flower filled patio, the telegraph poles were eucalyptus trees, starry blossomed, bark-stripped, the pile of cinders became a little shrine.

“The sword—” she still hummed, fairly drinking in the sweet, chill air.

“I’m ashamed for never having called,” interrupted a thin, distinct voice from a neighboring fire escape, “I’m so informal. No one ever called on me but I wouldn’t want to be the way most people are, would you? I’m Mrs. Oliver Sterling—across the hall. When I heard you were a bride——”

Startled from her day dream, Blair glanced up in confusion to see a petite blonde person in black broadcloth with striking organdie frills.

“I’ll run in and unlock the front door,” she hur-

ried to say, "I was loafing out here—and it is chilly. Do come along."

A moment later, Mrs. Sterling entered Twilldo and, with an appraising eye, estimated its contents, the calibre of her hostess and lack of a solitaire engagement ring. She was saying in baby doll fashion:

"Don't scare me by being formal. I'm the sort women misunderstand because their husbands like to talk to me. Ollie says I'll never grow up—what a dear little apartment—oh, you have no dining room either. Horrid, isn't it! Did you paint the furniture yourself—so clever. I adore French blue. Your husband is a lamb, isn't he? Have you any antiques? I am wild about them. Pine bedsteads? Do let me see them—why-ee, they are priceless—you ought to have them refinished and get smart lamp wicking spreads. We have a mahogany four poster but no chance for it in our two by four. You are a wonderful housekeeper, too, I've watched you fly around. I'm a naughty girl," with great pride, "I put on my kimono and read my magazines as if I had a retinue in the kitchen. I don't believe in wearing yourself out. Ollie calls me his Dresden doll, so I say he must hurry to get me a gold lined cabinet. If he doesn't, I'll des' be someone's else Dresden doll—I will! You must see Ollie, he is an

amiable old trout. Oh, I forgot—you are booky—worse yet, a college graduate! Me is 'fraid! But me was engaged ever so many times before me married Ollie—so there. Say, don't think I am entirely cuckoo," she ended naturally.

During this monologue, she had selected the easiest chair and made overtures towards a box of candy.

Then she rattled on: "I'm prejudiced against college women—they are so superior and so few marry or if they do, they go in for reform work, their husbands included. I'm a butterfly and glad of it. Now I don't mean this applies to *you*, because I'd never have come to see you if I felt the least bit that way. Little Muriel would have stayed on her own fire escape."

"You're quite misinformed about us," Blair was stimulated at the chance for an argument. "We like pretties and have as many affairs as you have. True, there are grubs and odd ones but——"

"Mercy, who is that dreadful looking Hubbell woman? Ollie says she is a lawyer—I should think the jury would fade out when she appeared."

"Roxy is a wonderful friend and woman," Blair dismissed the question carelessly, "but about college women: don't you see one advantage is that we are taught how to play as well as to work? For four

years or more, we have the opportunity to live with and understand, like, dislike, learn to tolerate all sorts of personalities which is as important as any course we may be taking. More or less, we learn how to play as we learn——”

“You make Muriel’s head ache,” Mrs. Sterling interrupted, “don’t talk theories. I was rude to have said a word about it. I’m such a child.”

Blair was convinced she was anything but a child. Muriel had peculiar, oblong, gray eyes, pale, gold hair and mere outlines for eyebrows. There was the hint of both tyrant and cheat in the set of her pouty, over-heavy mouth and the straight, thin nose. To have quoted Aunt Agnes, Muriel was “the sort over which men make fools of themselves all because they can’t seem to realize what a fool she is.”

“All right, only you can hardly expect me to be silent when you make sweeping statements. Let’s talk about yourself.” Blair was irritated as well as amused.

“No, dear lady. I’m a mouse thing from the country,” Muriel enlightened, “my people lost their money before I was born and went to live on a farm. Picture me doing the Maud Muller stunt? I couldn’t, either. I came here to work in a telephone exchange and in less than six months, I was en-

gaged to a rich old man. But his children—oh, boy, the riot! I didn't make a strong play, I knew I'd have other chances. He gave me awfully nice presents—this pin is one. I had it valued and it is worth two hundred. Then I took charge of the switchboard at Wooster Brothers and I could have fractured Sam Wooster's home life if I had really tried. I had plenty of other friends, too. Then I went to the Phoenix Hotel as the dining room cashier. You don't know what an unprotected girl has to put up with. My dear, if I could write as I talk—well, I don't know that I'd want to expose human nature that much. I was engaged to an awfully nice boy, Eddie Blumenthal—his family staged a panic. Eddie gave me stunning things, too—he was in the clothing business. All this time, Ollie was coming to the hotel for lunch. Of course, his people are one of the old families, if you want to try figuring out what that means. I don't. It doesn't mean money, dear, let me enlighten you right at the post. It means they are snobbish, stingy, unreasonable fanatics and I never ask them here. I go there when I'm shackled—Thanksgiving or Christmas. I'm as good as any Sterling—we were Ostranders and related to the kings of Holland, if you want to trace us back to when the kings of Hol-

land were doing day labor on the dykes." She gave an irresponsible giggle.

Blair was more and more amused. She was conscious that Muriel's rouging created a different effect from Polly's almost charming results. Muriel had a dangerous glint in her eyes, alternating with a shrewd expression. Blair felt she was "in for it" as long as they were neighbors. She wondered what Tony would have to say.

"The Sterlings know your husband's aunt and about his family. That is where I got a line on you. The Sterlings act as if I had kidnapped Ollie. I've almost gotten him to believing that his mother is a slave driver as well as a high brow and his sisters are without a bright line in their repertoire. Their house was furnished during the Ark period. Tell me, suffering wife, do you have to stand for Miss Judd?"

"She's a dear," defended Blair, "we have agreed to disagree politely. She is orthodox, I am not; she dusts over the tops of doors, I do not; I read Ouspensky and believe in birth control—she reads Tennyson and almost believes in fairies. But this has nothing to do with our being fond of each other—and polite," the scorn in her tone caused Muriel to blush far beyond the rouge boundaries.

"You must have a wonderful disposition; I have

not. My husband is my husband and I am out for my own way. The Sterlings rave at our being in debt. Do they think I'm going to play Cinderella because I'm afraid of a few bills? I will not be shabby, I will have a good time," she recalled herself from adding more opinions and ended, "Ollie is just beginning, good old fruit, he sells bonds and people with money are so conservative. But we'll get on. My, I've overstayed my twenty minutes—do come over and bring your Tony, we'll have a party. Do you drive a car? I thought not. Your father is grand, isn't he? I knew him, by sight, at the hotel. He is the jolly sort I like. Please set a day so you can't escape. Saturday—at four? Fine. So glad we are friends. I hate formality." Muriel pranced across the hall while Blair opened the windows to release the double strength harem extract with which Mrs. Sterling chose to be identified.

Tony's comment was characteristic: "Sterling comes of family but his people had so much money a while ago, they stopped doing everything but spending it. He chases around in his sedan and sports a cutie mustache—I never fancied him. I think he has married his match. There are two sorts of wives, lovely, the poison ivies and the pussy willows," here the conversation became pleasantly personal.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER her Saturday call, Blair decided Muriel was lonesome, being taboo among the Sterling set and without enough money to create her own jazz addicted bohemia. Her ambition was to be social leader in a smart set of some larger city and to raise toy dogs as a frequently photographed pastime. Until Muriel became of the motor gentry, she contented herself with nagging Oliver into making—or getting—more money, furnishing her apartment with hotel parlor fittings and spending her time reading froth, talking scandal, parading the downtown section with the compensation of knowing the men looked after her.

Blair came away resolved to see as little as possible of the Sterlings. In desperation, she paid two dollars to attend a luncheon of the civic club where she became indignant at hearing the rights still denied women in certain States. On the spur of the moment, she pledged five dollars for the campaign, suffering for days afterwards at her extravagance.

She was also asked to do a paper on child labor conditions in the Michigan beet fields, to be read at another luncheon a week later.

Neglecting cooking and mending, Blair emerged to read the paper and received congratulations. But she came home to find Tony had taken the afternoon off due to a headache. He was much concerned whether or not there would be anything he ought to eat for dinner. Blair had overplayed the sage in the chicken dressing, he complained, he could not stand any more highly flavored things.

"They are going to print my paper in the national bulletin," she announced, preparing to make milk toast.

"That so? Do you know I believe my glasses need changing?"

"Then see about it. There is junket for dessert. Half your trouble is too little exercise and over eating."

"I wish that Sterling woman would stop her player piano," Tony rose to slam down the window, "this was the worst of an apartment—all huddled together like a rabbit hutch. I'll be glad to leave."

"So will I," Blair agreed. In her haste, she had not put on an apron and a spot of flour paste was on her waist. "I hate spots on things. I'd rather

ruin the entire dress, it seems wicked to send a thing to the cleaners for one spot—and I can't get it off—two dollars and a half gone—tch—tch——”

“Perhaps I should not have asked for food,” grumbled Tony, “but I did not know it was a crime to be hungry.”

“Nor was it a crime to mention the spot,” Blair felt out of tune with things finite because she had been slightly in tune with things infinite. The afternoon had been breathless and absorbing, far removed from a kitchen cabinet atmosphere. “Florence Knight is home from Mexico—remember her? She was the class ahead of ours. She gave a stirring talk about the inside factions that we never hear of, she says that the——”

“Um. Pardon me, any bicarbonate tablets in the medicine case? I can't find them anywhere.”

Blair dashed away to return with an empty bottle. “You must not take so many, they eat the lining out of your stomach.”

“So does your cooking,” retorted Tony and was sorry instantly.

Blair finished her supper in hurt silence. Tony ate it meekly. As she washed the dishes, he came to the door to venture:

“I was rude, lovely, forgive me. I felt like the

devil. The office was wearing and I had forgotten about your meeting—I expected you to be home.”

She glanced up. Tony was full six feet and well proportioned. His handsome, somewhat Romanesque features and dark hair and eyes lent him distinction. His hair rumpled, minus his collar, his face flushed and his eyes wistful, he stirred her to pity.

“If you had told me you were coming,” she said slowly, “I would have sent the paper to be read. Poor Tonibus, he does work hard! Lie down and I’ll read to you. His wife sha’n’t be a poison ivy, shall she?”

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A week later, the Judds were invited to spend the evening with the Sterlings—go on a bat, as Muriel announced. To Blair’s amazement Tony favored accepting.

“I thought you did not like such people,” she protested, “we ought to stay home and re-paint the serving table.”

“I don’t. But Sterling must have a clientele or he could not exist and I like to meet people not in my line, get their viewpoint. You can understand. If we went this once, it would be a lark—we could

order ourselves accordingly in the future. It doesn't do to be too isolated."

Blair made ready. Muriel always acted as if intrigued with her environment, save when alone with her husband. She was as charming to Tony as she knew how. This both amused and flattered him. Muriel was always discovering just the man she should have married, she usually confided the fact shortly after being introduced. Tony was no exception to her rule and Blair was told to "run away and play with my Ollie."

There was a subtle Russian quality in Muriel's embroidered gown. Blair felt shabby by contrast and she was bored to tears with the polite efforts of Oliver Sterling, a weak chinned, well bred vacuum.

At three in the morning, the Judds faced each other in Twilldo and expressed surprise at the "bat" and their idiocy in having gone on it. It had consisted of visiting at the Sterlings' for over an hour, punctuated with cocktails which were "the real stuff, children," as Muriel reminded. Then they drove to a burlesque house where amateur night was holding forth and here they watched with more boredom than pity the unwashed trying to make the thespian grade. After this came the professional bill and at eleven, the quartette wandered into the slums to an

elaborate Chinese restaurant where they sat at a heavily inlaid table and ate fried noodles, listening to an electrical piano player grind out "Pack Up Your Sins and Go to the Devil." Muriel lit a cigarette and confided that she adored thrills, did anyone suppose there could be an opium den concealed in the rear of the café? She would be charmed to see it, yes, she would, she was just that kind of a cut-up. She put an affectionate arm about Tony's neck, challenging Blair to interfere. She wheedled Oliver into buying hideous dolls dressed as mandarins—the pair were five dollars.

From here, they drove slowly, senselessly along streets where windows were shrouded in gloom and bizarre lights burned enticingly from mysterious doorways—still in search of thrills! After midnight, they returned to the Sterling apartment to eat an ancient but active cheese and drink home brew beer.

The home brew caused Sterling to become thick tongued but confidential, he was going to put Tony onto such a good thing, he would clip bond coupons the rest of his life. He was doing this because he loved Tony Judd—hic—even if he was an ordinary looking pup, as he concluded with a falsetto shriek, at which Muriel accused gaily:

“Ollie’s spiffed—he is going to tell secrets.”

The Judds would have gone, but the Sterlings saw no reason for breaking up the gathering. Ollie ruffled Tony’s hair, insisting, “I love this—ordinary—looking—pup.” And Muriel said she was so ashamed of her husband, she wanted to jump into the cage and change places with the canary, at which Oliver thickly objected:

“Don’t—hic—he’s—moulting.”

This reminded Muriel of the peppiest story—dare she tell it—well, everyone look the other way——

When a forced laugh told her she had fallen short of the mark, Oliver came to the rescue by finishing the last of the tnt beer and falling into noisy slumber. This permitted the Judds to say goodnight, with Muriel following them to their door to urge:

“Don’t be shocked, it is only the Sterlings! When you ask us in, we will eat peppermints and talk about the crops. We only cut up on our own home diamonds—I’ll not bother to move Ollie, when he falls on the floor that will wake him up and he can get off to bed. He’s a treat, isn’t he? He doesn’t do this oftener than twice a month!”

Tony and Blair wondered which one would voice

the more robust indictment. Blair took the initiative.

"Of all eternal fools," she said bluntly, "we lead! Just four hours of sleep ahead for us," winding the alarm clock relentlessly.

Tony, who had partaken liberally of the home brew, was both bright and argumentive.

"I wouldn't say quite that—I consider it all experience. . . . I don't think Sterling will sell many bonds tomorrow——"

A muffled thud came to them through the partition. Blair laughed.

"That is the hard working Mr. Sterling falling on the floor."

"You ought to be more of a cosmopolitan," Tony insisted, sitting up in bed. "You are no school girl—besides, I was with you! Bully fried noodles, weren't they? And what a hat Muriel wore—we need never go again but I can't say I regard it as——"

"Stop," ordered Blair, "if you could see yourself in the mirror, you would realize the accuracy of Oliver's description."

CHAPTER V

THE bat resulted in a brief estrangement between Tony and Blair. The alarm clock failing to arouse Tony at seven, despite the repeater call, Blair dressed, prepared and ate breakfast and was washing the dishes before Tony tumbled out of bed and grunted some interrogation as to the time.

It was nine o'clock. He would be very late even if he hurried. He felt that Blair might have awakened him—oh, alarm clock be damned—she might have shaken him. Anyway, he had done nothing to exclaim about, the Sterlings were not his friends, Blair had accepted the invitation. She was making a mountain out of a mole hill—where was a clean shirt? Oh, this one with every button hole torn—why not examine things when they came home? No time to begin to thread a needle now—so, he had no other clean shirt—she had forgotten to send the bundle yesterday—splendid! He would wear slightly soiled linen which he despised. Would she please, kindly and for cat's sake STOP talking

about the Sterlings, he was weary of their very name—what punk stuff to drink, too—and that cheese! Everyone knew Chinese messes spelt ruin to any alimentary canal—no, he was not hungry, a cup of coffee and a few kind words would be more to the point. So she had eaten her breakfast—wasn't she the punctual little party?

At ten, Tony left for the office, having omitted his usual: "Goodbye, lovely, don't do anything rash until you see me."

At ten five, Blair was in tears. She wondered if her mother had taken to her invalid's sofa in unsuspected defeat at ever making her father true up to ideals? She told herself that Tony was a self-indulgent, selfish person, she wished she had Muriel's viewpoint which permitted a husband to fall from his chair as the only means of helping him to bed. It was not well to sacrifice too much for a man's welfare!

Blair had a pride in not confiding the incident to anyone. Judd and wife were not prone to broadcast differences. She felt the lack of sleep as she snailed about her work. Dusting the books, it occurred to her how little she had read, or thought, since her marriage. Tony had the idea she was a dear little thing, content with kisses and fifteen dol-

lars a month allowance. He had lost sight of her being a co-partner, able to work with and for him. He was impatient when reminded of the fact, she was made to feel such statements were a trifle stale.

She wondered what Muriel was doing, although resolved to have no more to do with her. Still, they were forced to co-operate in using the clothes line and other domestic details. This apartment seemed a burlesque on privacy and home life. Presently, she saw the Sterlings, well dressed and serene, drive off with evidently no thought of last night's programme. Every night was party night, as Muriel had announced.

Blair put on her wraps and sought out Roxy. She would go about with her for the day, lose sight of petty injury in impersonal wrongs. Much as she disapproved of Roxy's peevishness during tonsillitis, Blair found advantages in sharing Roxy's interests. Not only was Roxy unique, but she was courageous and sincere. Hers was an inconsistent, but altruistic warrior spirit which carried her into endless and interesting battles.

This day, Blair found her setting out for a state institution where an inmate's family protested the treatment. Roxy was to champion the case although she knew the probable antagonism and minute finan-

cial returns. She tucked Blair under her arm and marched her out to the modest coupé. Roxy recited the facts as she steered the wheel, Blair forgetting her own worries.

As they entered the institution, Blair felt a mere molecule—so was Tony. The Judds were an unimportant couple as she temporarily accepted Roxy's gauge. A great humanitarian impulse to liberate and uplift downtrodden and diseased mankind—and escape such drudgery as emptying the ice box pan and cleaning the spinach—swept over Mrs. Anthony Judd!

With pride, she listened to Roxy's verbal battle and the superintendent's eager efforts at reconciliation. Roxy was not to be swerved from her path. Conditions must be righted, restitution made. Publicity was nothing she feared, no institution could afford investigation without shaking the people's confidence. Glowering with rage, the superintendent writhed under Roxy's challenge—another date was set for a compromise meeting. A turn of her trim, tailored shoulder and Roxy escorted Blair out of the place where human remnants chattered and shrieked. Outside, Roxy purposely turned the subject to lightweight homespun.

"I don't expect you to enthuse, chiffon frill," she

said indulgently, "but I'm keen for homespun and if I go as delegate to the Switzerland conference, I cannot be bothered with a trunk. A good looking suit with swank waists and the trick is done."

"Really go abroad—how splendid!"

"Wouldn't it be—hi, boy, keep to your own side," as she averted a collision. "Then they say men are the better drivers. When you have a car, learn to drive yourself, Blair. You'd have a lot of fun from a little bus; one tap of the starter and you're removed from the crochet and baking powder propaganda."

"You remind me of a breeze blowing away cobwebs," said Blair, "tell me more things I ought to do."

This pleased Roxy. By the time they lunched at the "Cock and Kettle," done an hour at juvenile court, a look-in at the club, an interview with the vendor of homespun and a cigarette in Roxy's office, Blair was willing to be set down at the Gramatan with the promise this programme be repeated.

"You need it," Roxy urged, "far be it from me to come between man and wife—but your brain is tarnishing. You spend your days cooking for Tony and your evenings watching him devour your results. I know the home idea is rampant in our puny civili-

zation—I'm not out to argue against it—not while the gas is chugging away at twenty-seven per—but remember, Blair, you knew a lot of people at college but you are a comparative stranger here. Don't let Tony absorb you—the trouble is that women wait until it is too late to make a stand for freedom. Then it is either a burlesque or a tragedy. We want 'em young—just like the bald head row!"

Blair toiled upstairs, the elevator not running, to find a card from a classmate who was passing through town, two bills, an ad for a washing machine. Unwillingly she cooked a simple dinner. She felt Tony owed her an apology. If a man was impolite because he did not hear his alarm clock, well—was he a full grown man? Blair's day had furnished rebellious thoughts, there was so much without the walls of Twilldo—so very much—and Tony saw and mingled with that "much" daily.

She had prepared a cutting, forceful speech for Tony's homecoming. But it was speedily forgotten when she was surprised by a contrite young husband who handed her a corsage of rosebuds—the sort he presented when they were engaged.

"I was beastly," he began, disarming her at once. "Everything went wrong today—I started wrong

when I did not kiss you goodbye. No use, Blair, you are my mascot."

She came into his arms. "We can avoid the Sterlings from now on—I'll be so cheerful when tomorrow's alarm sounds, you'll think I've had the Pollyanna serum. There is no reason why we should allow trifles to spoil our joy."

Blair had forgotten her speech—and Roxy's advice. The day's events seemed coldly impersonal, rather sordid. It was far more wonderful to serve her dinner and witness Tony's appreciation of it, hear him applaud himself in handling the day's situations, lie on the davenport while he read poetry to her until she forgot dish washing and the leak in the laundry tubs. She looked at Tony's roses, the glow of the lamp lent the furnishings of the room an artistic richness. Tony seemed more handsome and powerful than ever—how well he read sonnets. Blair pitied Roxy who was forced to be interested in institutions.

Both Tony and Blair felt somewhat exalted—and magnanimous—as the sequel to this little mid-channel!

CHAPTER VI

IT was almost May before Blair lunched with Roxy again—then it was at a business women's weekly affair. Seated next to Roxy, Blair ate her mutton chop, shoe string potatoes and canned peas while listening to a wild haired orator describe how soon civilization was to be a thing of the past. During the dessert of eclairs and coffee, someone sang love lyrics. Everyone voted it a remarkable meeting. Roxy persuaded Blair to stay for the get-together half hour. There were interesting women to meet. There were insurance agents, hair dressers, stenographers, department store buyers, school teachers, one lady undertaker who was violently proud of the fact. Unrestrainedly, they told what they did and how they came to do it—sometimes, how they got away with it. They were dressed in every degree of style from Roxy's uniform to a candidate for the Follies. Many were divorced or bona-fide widows, there seemed to be an abundance of names like "Mrs. Mirabelle Downing Rasmussen"

or "Mrs. Juanita Conover-Fitzhughes." Yet they were sure not only of themselves but their futures, Blair decided. By contrast, she seemed but a blushing bride. They were insistent that Blair join.

"I'm not a business person," she warned.

"Time ahead for that," said Mrs. Isabelle Colvocoresses Peck, pocketing the initial dollar. Mrs. Peck was a strikingly blonde yet motherly faced woman with a worn, rouged face. She was expensively dressed but her hands betrayed the hallmarks of erstwhile manual labor. Blair could not estimate her until Roxy explained she had been married twice, both husbands a total loss, and was now making good as a character analyst.

Blair planned to do errands yet reach Twilldo in time to make Tony's favorite deep dish apple pie. She was pleased with the luncheon, she would have liked to have learned the history of every woman present. Roxy could have told her, only Roxy was due at the district attorney's office, there was a thrilling case of grand larceny on hand.

She left Blair wafting into a department store, undecided whether to afford a new dress or freshen her gray charmeuse by means of lace.

"Ah, cherie, cornered at last," announced Muriel Sterling, intercepting her at the lace counter, "I've

waited my chance. You are coming up to the Pink Fountain Room for tea—I want to apologize. Only this morning, Ollie said, ‘The Judds must have passed us up as bad actors—I’m sorry we are in wrong.’ Really, dear, it was accidental—at least let me explain. Ollie likes you so much, says you’d be an excellent influence for me,” with a knowing wink.

Weakly, Blair was led to the tea room to be told in insincere superlatives how much her neighbors thought of her straightforward, cultured little self! All the time she was speaking, Blair was realizing how well dressed Muriel was—her henna colored frock with its cape and hat to match, a cape dotted with expensive mink tails. Yet for all this adornment, she seemed a shabby cheat.

In a breath with apologizing for the party, Muriel confided she had bought a dazzling three piece costume and charged it to Ollie’s mother, who could not repudiate her daughter-in-law, proud old thing. Oh, she had done it before—not too often—but every now and then. She had ordered a marvellous hat to be sent on approval, she would return it tomorrow having worn it that evening to a theater party. She wanted her hostess to feel the Sterlings paid an income tax resembling the German war debt. Oh—

did Mrs. Judd think this wrong? Everyone did it—who could be blamed for borrowing pretties? She often had rugs and lamps sent up when she was going to entertain. As for their baby-grand player—she did not dare ask the repair man to come near lest he take it away, the first payment had been all they felt able to manage to date—one must live! Mercy, ‘dis chile’ must be careful—if ever she borrowed an egg from Mrs. Judd, she would bring it right back if she had to pawn her wedding ring.

Blair was led down to a taxi, following this confessional, and was obliged to invite the Sterlings for an evening the following week. (She resolved to give a discourse on the fourth dimension as the chief pastime.)

“Goodbye, honey,” Muriel sang out, as they parted at their respective doors. “Oh—did you notice the man in front of the Roanoke Hotel—the one in the tan coat and green fedora—rather distinguished and dissipated looking?”

“I don’t recall him,” Blair was impatient to be away.

“Probably not—it was Harty Dukes, a sporting editor—I could have married him, too.”

It was too late to cook anything resembling a dinner. Blair was obliged to resort to a can opener

for which she was punished when Tony came to the table.

"I meant to have a real meal," Blair explained, "but after the luncheon, I met Muriel—" she recited the afternoon programme, while Tony toyed with sardines.

"I see—yet I'm expected to come home and look happy over this sort of a dinner," he said impatiently. "I'm starved, too, I went without my lunch to see an important customer and land his order. Moreover, I'm due for a raise in salary—only thirty more a month but it is not a discouraging symptom. I came home primed with the glad tidings and find you have wasted your day with that radical Roxy and then the semi-demi neighbor. When I lived at home, my aunt never once—"

"I am not interested in when you lived at home." Blair was too tired to remain dignified, "The calories you need are in this same despised dinner, I can prove it. Besides, there is your aunt's currant jelly. That will remind you of when you lived at home. Really, I despise a glutton," in sudden hysteria, Blair left the table.

Tony made a systematic cleanup of the food. Then he cleared the table, whistling in an irritating, cheery monotone. Later, Blair heard the kitchen

water running, she knew he was washing the dishes. She sprang up in self-surrender.

"I was wrong to be late—but it was not a world disaster," she said, coming into the kitchen. "Please stop piling kettles on top of glassware—let me do it—I'd much rather."

Tony did not yield. "I can go on short rations when it is necessary," he said, "but I did not see why it was this particular time. We both made poor connections—I should have had lunch, you should have left things cooked for dinner. But don't bother about it again."

This unfamiliar attitude confused Blair. She asked absent mindedly, "Why did you call Muriel the semi-demi?"

"Because she has the tastes and habits of a demi-mondaine but was wise enough to marry before expressing them freely. There are many like her these days, uneducated, baby doll tyrants who think tears and dimples win any cause. Muriel dominates that weak-willed, well-bred husband of hers, she'll drive him off the face of the earth in her desire for more money. I found out about the Sterlings—they have a chattel mortgage on their furniture. But that does not bother Mrs. Sterling. The only thing that would keenly distress her would be to wake up

and find a six weeks' growth of eyebrow on her fair face. And my wife took tea—"

"I could not help it," Blair made a terrific soap suds as indicative of her mental turmoil, "she asked for an opportunity to apologize. I could not refuse any more than you would think of telling her she is a semi-demi. Come, Tony, forgive me the lapse of a meal—agree that Muriel is not worth serious analysis."

There was no further reconciliation. Both were polite but monosyllabic and consumed with the sudden desire to write letters.

The next morning, after Tony left, Blair planned her day not only to satisfy her husband but to prove a new, scornful theory. She spent the morning baking the deep dish pie and the afternoon cooking an elaborate dinner. She dressed herself in a crisp pink voile and kept the dinner warm in double boilers. She was at leisure when Tony came in, undecided how to conduct his manly, masterful self.

The sight of Blair so tender of expression, so attractive in her pink frock—to say nothing of the heavenly odors proceeding from the kitchenette, decided him at once.

"Have you missed me as much as I miss you, lovely?" he asked.

She was amused—such a child to be influenced by a roast lamb dinner and a deep dish pie dessert! How little he knew, as he paid her compliments and insisted she take ten of his additional salary each month, using it solely for her own purposes, that Blair's eyes were straying from Tony's face, slightly greasy at the corners of his mouth, to his desk upon which reposed her typewriter—and she was thinking of her theory: no man ever leaves a really competent cook!

CHAPTER VII

By July, Blair abandoned theories and took to wondering. Her father's welcome yet revealing visit started this transition. He came for a six weeks' stay, beginning in June, stopping at a hotel nearby and eating at Twilldo. Having become addicted to Blair's cooking, he patted her cheeks and gave her a hundred dollars but he devoted himself to Tony! These two went forth to club smokers, tennis matches, boxing shows, a week's fishing trip where Blair would have been *persona non grata* as she was frankly informed.

That same week, Blair canned strawberries under pressure on the part of Aunt Agnes. Her fingers stained, her brain tarnished, Blair realized it was one thing to be abreast in the commercial world with the sustaining knowledge that a loyal wife waited home to reward effort and comfort defeat, feeding and caring for you meantime, a wife apparently content with her husband's infantile demand for protection and affection. But it was quite another to be left

with an empty larder and a fragile pocket book to solve the situation when one's mind had been trained to juggle with impersonal problems. To argue with tradespeople and day help, and have the four walls of the "little nest" take on the narrowing, unfair aspect of a prison—this was not what Blair had expected or deserved.

True, for two rather nice tempered persons, housework in a small apartment is no bugaboo but when a girl has been an embryo advertising "shark" according to her classmates, and spent her summers wearing good-looking sports clothes, housekeeping becomes a nightmare. The trouble, as Blair discovered, was lack of mental fresh air. Cloying romance, as she petulantly called it, was insufficient ventilation.

Following the fishing trip were more canning orgies. Tony thought this was a wonderful opportunity for Blair to learn such arts. He seemed to take for granted the monotonous and additional labor. To Blair it was overtime, unpaid-for work which curtailed her pleasure and ruined her hands. Well she knew who would eat up most of the results!

"Fine to have an old-fashioned cook teach you," her father had added.

His present of a hundred dollars, given after

being shown rows of parafine topped glasses and pots, Blair resolved to use for outside interests. Clothes were not essential. Yet how could she enjoy or pursue outside interests if she was duty bound to continue to crown glasses and pots with parafine? She wondered if she betrayed irritation to Aunt Agnes who was delighted at Blair's aptness. Blair had been an intelligent pupil because, as yet, she had no other course to pursue. As long as she was mentally groping, uncertain of her ground, she might as well put her time to good use. When Tony apologized for their not taking a vacation—although he went up the lakes on business and with his father-in-law for a week's fishing—Blair made no protest. They had saved money by foregoing a trip, she was hoping to do personal things this winter, Tony must be agreeable when she did so. Her silence was not acquiescence.

Muriel had gone to the north shore with her husband's people. They had not wanted her, she admitted frankly, but she had put it up to them on the grounds of Ollie's health and the opportunity to meet worth-while, bond buying people. Besides, she rented her apartment to some teachers in the summer school and asked Blair to care for her noisy parakeets. The relationship between the Sterlings

and the Judds had been one of polite tolerance on both sides. The Sterlings spent an evening at Twilldo during which Blair served a rarebit and coffee and they played bridge, but the Judds never found it convenient to re-visit the Sterlings. Tony lunched with Oliver occasionally, after which he would confide that "Oliver is a gentleman but utterly vamped for all time."

When the social column announced that Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Sterling of the Gramatan were leaving to occupy Castle Craneycrow in company with Mrs. de Forest Sterling and daughters—Blair gave vent to a womanly attack upon the semi-demi. She was determined to win a tribute from someone, a thin disguise for the mental expression she craved. Therefore, she dilated upon the beauty of devoting one's self to a home, without thought of personal glory, versus the way Muriel had chosen. When Blair finished, all that remained intact was Muriel's cleverness at cutting silhouettes.

She received glowing endorsements for this tirade from Aunt Agnes, her father and Tony! For twenty-four hours, she anesthetized herself by repeating them. She was halfway convinced she would not miss Roxy, who had sailed for Switzerland, or Polly Arnold, motoring through the west,

or mind in the least when she did string beans, corn and tomatoes while Tony went to the advertising convention in Boston! Blair was doing her duty—upon such unflinching, industrious women as herself rested the nation's sanity.

But the heat sapped her strength, long hours over the stove and paring board, the endless drivel of petty details, Tony's absence, her father's attitude of: "Well, you decided wisely, after all—you chose a fine husband and have settled down" both disappointed and alarmed her. Even Tony prided himself he was "aces up with my wife's dad." Tony boasted of Blair's cooking these days, asked company for dinner without warning her. Somehow the hundred dollar check and the additional monthly allowance spent themselves for a cold pack preserving outfit, a fireless cooker, an electrical sewing machine!

September found Blair crestfallen—without a wave in her bright, brown hair. She was wondering as to her winter clothes, dreading Polly's and Roxy's return, wishing her father would start on his trip, eager for the first meeting of the Garret Club. Most of all, she regretted her insincere vituperation of Muriel Sterling, not because it was inaccurate, but because it was a cowardly way to have

attained approbation. She was acting like a pussy willow when all the time she was discovering that she preferred to be a poison ivy!

When there was a blue-gray haze in the wine flavored air, Tony had to have a good looking overcoat, heavy shoes, woolens and gloves. Blair could manage nicely with what she had. They dipped into their bank account to the extent of outfitting him with the result that Tony said solemnly he could never be good enough for such a wonderful wife as Blair.

This time, Blair added, "Probably not."

Little Tony suspected, as he stood before her in his new clothes, that Blair indulged in a vision all her own. Instead of the well groomed, alert Tony, she saw herself in a trim, business tailor, physically rested, mentally fit, following Tony out of the door to her own absorbing, impersonal business.

Although the ecstasy of this vision dulled to reality, Blair found herself asking, "And why not?" Only to answer a vague, dutiful, "Because." But the conflict had begun.

CHAPTER VIII

It was Roxy, resplendent in London tweeds, who dragged Blair into active club work, beginning with the consumers' league. Roxy's disapproval of Blair's mental slump, added to her offering of French gloves, roused Blair to action. She resented Roxy's seeing her on the down far less than she would Polly or Muriel. The latter was stopping in New York before returning to "my cocoon" she had written.

Roxy also persuaded Blair to forego doing tardy quinces and act as volunteer investigator for the humane society. "That will start you off on someone's else wrongs," she said frankly, "I had no idea you would be in town all summer—stove-scorched little wife. Did friend husband enjoy the fishing?"

Blair defended Tony's trips, protesting that she preferred remaining home. "Nothing is ever wasted," she said weakly, "I've learned some useful things."

She was driving with Roxy in the park, sniffing the crisp air scented with leaf bonfires. Reflecting Roxy's viewpoint, she became animated when she reported to Tony what Roxy had said.

"So she is trying to get you into reform muck," Tony answered carelessly, "Watch your step, lady fair. I thought you were too busy to repay calls let alone go investigating."

"Oh, that sort of social thing—I haven't time. When I finish the housework I—do you ever think of my mind?" she demanded.

She was so sincere that Tony refrained from being humorous. "I think how lovely you are—a dozen times a day."

"No, not that. Do you ever realize we have been married months and I have merely drudged, not knowing what you do at the office, that you no longer consult me? Yet I could be your substitute and do your work as well as you do it yourself—but you could not do mine," she folded her arms triumphantly.

"Granted! Want to trade?" he was irritated in spite of himself. Gradually, Tony had come to regard Blair's college life as one of her adorable whims, he no longer boasted of it—he preferred to dilate on the skill of her cooking.

"No, I would not. I have never thought of giving up the house for any regular position, although it would be better pay and shorter hours," she could not help adding. "When we married, I was ready and eager to be the home-maker. I am perfectly content as far as that goes——"

"Only it does not go as far as you wish?" Tony was on the defensive. "Be patient, wait until I've enough salary to give you an electric cab that can run Roxy's flivver off the highway and plenty of maids and a——"

"I don't want things any more than I do an independent position—at least not now," she corrected. "I feel so underestimated—and overloved! There! I don't share your brain, Tony—only your heart. Perhaps I'm tired," an annoying tear dripped off her cheek.

Tony started in alarm. "It is the fool stuff Roxy spouts. Always contrary to every normal law and tradition, I suppose she wants you to work in a box factory, to know your sisters' sordidness firsthand and catch small-pox as a reward. Don't mix with her set, please—stay my own precious wife," he put his arms about her in protecting fashion.

Blair leaned her head on his shoulder in shamed contentment. "I am glad to be," she said incon-

sistently, "perhaps your precious wife is wishing for the moon—and blaming you because she does not seem able to get it."

Tony was relieved! He was particularly "ducky" for the next fortnight, his attentions soothed Blair. He brought her flowers and novels and insisted she come to his club for dinner. In November, they visited their alma mater, a week end of hilarious sport, that delightful on-looking with the superior feeling of having once been the looked-upon. Blair felt dauntless when she returned. She experienced the same thrill of pride as when they returned from their honeymoon. Until Christmas, she was convinced life was too perfect to hint of readjustments. Aunt Agnes was amazed at her housewifely interest, her father offered to pay the difference in rent if they would lease a larger apartment so he might stay with them when in town. They were considering this when Tony appeared to triumphantly announce that his salary, starting January first, was to be three hundred and ten a month! No more apartments for the Judds. They would find a suburban home.

The Sterlings were on Blair's nerves. Since their return, Muriel had forced Blair into being a confidant. She had the habit of running in unexpectedly to consult or borrow, cry with vexation over

some crossed wish, laugh unpleasantly at winning her way at someone else's expense. Blair never introduced Muriel to her friends nor went out with her if she could avoid it—but in some unfair fashion, she had come to feel responsible for the semi-demi!

Besides, Blair was eager to be further away from Aunt Agnes. Although fond of her, she resented the constant interference. To have someone invade her kitchen to re-scald preserves, re-season soup, even regulate one's bureau drawers between times was not congenial. If Blair was in her own house, what a solid, protecting place that noun suggested, Aunt Agnes might hesitate before invading. Blair longed for a garden; they had outgrown Twilldo. Their possessions had increased—a habit possessions have—and when they had five for dinner, the little room groaned with its inability to expand.

Other changes were happening. Roxy had been appointed to a position in the district attorney's office, Polly had her engagement ring, the Sterlings announced that bonds were selling well and they had rented an expensive apartment on the avenue. There was a café at this new apartment house, Muriel explained, and here they would eat unless Oliver provided a maid. There was but one way to manage a husband, she hoped Blair would discover

the system before too long—just go right ahead and manage him.

Christmas caused Blair to recall the advice. She had given Tony a fitted bag and made him a lounging robe, copied after an expensive model. Her father, happening into town, had accepted Aunt Agnes's invitation to dinner.

Christmas morning, Roxy telephoned to ask if Blair would give evidence against the inhumane person who left a half grown cat to starve to death in the cellar and who insisted he was innocent until someone reminded him that he had done the same thing the previous summer—only the cat was rescued by means of a broken window. He then explained that he had left the kitten in the house—with a tub of water in case of thirst—because he wished his place rid of rats and if the kitten had been fed, it would have been indifferent as to catching them!

Blair, who had reported the case, had been properly indignant. She enjoyed Tony's denouncement of a man who could be such a brute. But when it involved going into court to prosecute this culprit, who happened to be a prosperous, east-side merchant—that was another matter. Tony felt it quite Roxyesque to interrupt a holiday with her "damned nonsense."

"Couldn't she have waited?" he said. "If she does not consider Christmas as anything but an emotional feast, she might realize others do."

"She had to telephone because she is leaving town on a ten o'clock train," Blair defended, "she is going to a sister who is ill. The case comes on the January calendar and she had to know where I stood—of course I said yes. You were indignant enough when I told you about it."

"Tell her no, if you value my wishes," Tony demanded, "and stop investigating. We don't want this man's enmity—now that you think of it, he is an old-time foreigner and probably did not realize that it was cruel. Is a half grown cat sufficient cause to embroil a community? It is better dead."

"True. But the deliberate unkindness is what we want to stop and——"

"I'm not the judge," he cut in, "don't argue with me. Please believe I am right. Ask your father if you want a higher authority. He is kindness itself to an animal but he would never approve your going into court. The cat is dead, the man has been frightened and won't do it again. He is probably anti-cat for the rest of his reincarnations."

"He does not blanket his horses," Blair added indignantly. "I shall introduce that, too."

Tony drew a package from his pocket. "Wear this and forget the breathless jurymen. Merry Christmas, lovely, it is almost a year, isn't it?"

The box contained an enamelled bracelet set with brilliants, an article of jewelry Blair never wore. Her wrist watch, her mother's sapphire ring, her wedding ring were sufficient. Some day, she wanted a string of pearls. This must have cost a great deal of money—and she needed a dress hat and a vacuum cleaner, particularly the vacuum cleaner!

Another time and Blair would have concealed any vestige of dissatisfaction. But the arrogant command of, "Woman, stay within the gates. I love you but you must not gainsay me," the unsuitability and extravagance of Tony's gift which told her he neither understood nor gauged her abilities, caused her to lay it aside with a brief:

"Thank you. Aren't you afraid it will call attention to my red wrists? Scouring powder and ammonia are not exactly soothing."

Tony stood up and pushed his chair from the table, they were having a late, holiday breakfast.

"Sorry you are displeased." He assumed a businesslike brevity. "Your wrists seem very lovely to me . . . guess it is going to snow."

"That will make it seem like Christmas," Blair cleared the table.

"I'll take a turn outside—you can change the bracelet if you wish," he added, buttoning his coat, "perhaps you'd like to start a monument to the starved feline you seem bent on immortalizing."

"How unfair," Blair set down a teacup with an abrupt clatter, "if you were irritated at the office, you would remain serene—you would not betray yourself to an office boy. But to your wife—on Christmas—you are as——"

"Excitable and petty as you are," the church chimes rang discordantly on the ears of Judd and wife, "had I acted that way about your presents, you would have been flecked on the raw, too. To be frank, I'm not keen for a fitted bag. And whatever pattern you copied that robe from, it is shy about six inches of sleeve."

"You are childish," Blair accused. Both of them looked at the unwanted bracelet which sparkled maliciously from within its jeweller's box.

"Do you know why I bought you that?" Tony asked, "or do you care to know why?"

"I do," Blair conceded slowly.

"I bought it because I thought of you as different from every other girl in the world and the bracelet

was different from everything else you had. I wanted you to know that I think of you as my dream girl as well as my housekeeper."

He waited for an apology. Then he ended impulsively: "I see you don't believe it—but because I do think of you as different, I can't bear to have you mixing with Roxy's lawless element. Perhaps you think I've been lack lustre at times, in contrast to our courtship days, but you are wrong. My aim is to make you happy, give you the best financial and social standing I can. But, gosh almighty, I can't crack a safe and get away with it."

"Have I suggested you buy a kit of burglar's tools?" Blair's unruly tongue demanded.

"Be reasonable—believe that I am getting on as fast as it would be wise for me to get on. I couldn't stand too much success any more than I deserve a landslide. I am happy if only you are happy. I aim to go share and share. I take more of an allowance than you do only because I have to have it for business. If it were not for you—I'd have cut loose long ago and stepped wide and handsome, too. But what's the use trying to explain——"

Blair did not seem inclined to answer. He looked back in a last appeal. "I ask you not to go on with this humane court case, it will not accomplish a .

permanent reform. It will only weary and disgust you. If I have made an unfortunate selection for a present, we will change it. Come halfway, won't you? Give me a few years in which to make good—see how I prove up. You can chuck me then, if you like." Tony had a sufficient love of the dramatic, excellent in his work, to make a timely exit, banging the door as a final punctuation mark.

Blair, also endowed with a sufficient love of the dramatic to be somewhat uncertain, slipped on the bracelet and christened it with penitent tears. She had been unfair! Hardworking, tender Tony—she should have understood. To have found fault with his present! Reluctantly, she removed it and set about to wash the dishes. She felt contrite because Tony had not eaten his full quota of cakes and sausage! There was no dinner to be cooked, which allowed her time for a careful toilette, a zealous powdering of her wrists before adjusting the bracelet and an eager watching at the window for the return of the downtrodden hero. All the improbable catastrophes which might overtake Tony suggested themselves as she watched heavy snow flakes form permanent ridges on the curbs. She vowed she would wire Roxy a retraction of her promise, she must be patient and sympathetic regarding Tony's

progress, remember that the housekeeping was her part. If only his tall figure would round the corner.

Which it did, strolling contentedly to enjoy a cigar. As Blair realized this, there came to her mind the inevitable self-defense. Why had Tony not made it his business to know what she wanted? She had studied his needs carefully. (He had always wanted a fitted bag, and had been on the point of buying a new robe.) She answered herself that Tony made no effort to know her otherwise than romantically; he barred out what could be satisfactory companionship. By contrast with his work, Tony's tastes had become Blair's dislikes. He delighted in crime stories, wild west movies, musical comedies, funny tales with double meanings, long Sunday naps, heavy Sunday dinners! But even Blair did not glimpse the source of the trouble which lay in Tony's lack of co-operation in his home. He was, as are many estimable husbands, young and old, who pay all bills and are seen crowding jewelers' counters at the holidays—a shirker when it involved personal effort. To his mind, home was a magical place which rendered him homage and creature comforts and before the door of which he said an open sesame at five thirty daily!

Tony came into Twilldo with the dignified air of

the injured party. After saving money to buy a bracelet most women would gloat over, to have Blair want to rant before a judge and reporters ask her opinion as to one piece bathing suits, likely as not—no sir, a man ought not be handed that kind of a deal. Still, it was Christmas—there was something underbred in having more than a passing argument.

Blair did not fly into his arms nor did he invite her. With admirable graciousness, she invited him:

“Come see how adorable your bracelet looks. If the sleeves are too short, I can easily change them.”

Tony asked for no more concessions. “It is adorable because you wear it,” gallantly kissing her hand. “I’m delighted with my bag and the robe fits like a French model. What a pair of sillies we are—eh, Blair?”

She made the final concession. “I’ll not go to court—this time. Only please don’t say I misunderstand you. I’ll wait, Tony.”

After Aunt Agnes’s prolonged blessing, she gazed upon Mr. and Mrs. Judd with proud satisfaction.

“They can’t tell us they are not happy,” insisted Dad Norcross.

Tony glanced at Blair. In unison they answered their elders:

“Righto. We still believe in Santa Claus.”

CHAPTER IX

By spring, Blair realized that her life had narrowed as any young wife's life must if she is solely concerned with her husband's success and the maintenance of even a Twilldo. A child was coming in the autumn which stupendous prospect made personal dissatisfaction ignoble.

Tony, who was happy and helpless, had agreed to move into the country. It would insure fresh air and quiet for Blair and the baby, removal from Aunt Agnes who was certain to come to grief with Blair as to the methods of modern baby raising. Blair had had no experience with infancy, she admitted. But she absorbed several modern books so she could quote the authority for her convictions. She had started to prepare a simple outfit when Aunt Agnes, from the kindest of motives, unearthed a box of Tony's historical garments made after the wasteful and inconvenient patterns of some twenty-five years ago. The sentiment attached to them, as well as Aunt Agnes's feelings, overruled Blair's im-

pulse of refusal. Painstakingly, she remodelled and demolished the lace encrusted and tucked garments. With these added tasks, there was small time to be annoyed by Muriel, who considered Blair a legal slave.

Blair did not attempt to enlighten Muriel. But in view of moving and motherhood, she resigned from active membership in organizations, comforted by the thought that when her child was old enough, it would be a simple matter to renew interests.

Polly came weekly to sew with Blair, Polly on her trousseau, Blair on her layette. Sometimes Roxy dropped in to applaud or confuse them. They would end by listening to Roxy discuss world topics in a breezy fashion. Roxy now had the exclusive air of all public officials, so Blair accused.

"Yet I adore hearing you talk," she said, one twilight afternoon, following a spirited discourse on the increasing drug habit. "I rely on Polly to be the baby's godmother, she will look a picture book person as she stands before the font, the infant wrapped in satin bordered eiderdown. But you, Roxy, are my godmother—you must keep me from being too stupid."

"Like Barkis, 'I'm willin',' but are you?" demanded Roxy. "No use asking now—a year hence

perhaps. Only don't ask me to wheel your child in the park—friendship has its limitations.”

“As if Blair was not to be envied,” reproved Polly, twisting her solitaire on her slim finger. “I don't like you, Roxy, when you belittle the fundamentals of life—what is your life compared to Blair's—there's a challenge?”

“Thank you,” Blair patted Polly's hand. “Now, Roxy, speak up.”

“My life is my sort of selfishness,” said Roxy unconcernedly, “but no more so than yours. Only my form of expression is less usual, therefore more commented upon. I dare say I'll have years of being bored with my own company, I'll dread the time after office hours, I'll despise myself sufficiently. I dare say you will have years of being lonesome and ignored, yearning for someone's respect and appreciation when your children are grown and you realize you have not kept early contacts and it is too late to form new ones. You'll be considered passé, although you will have a wiser head and kinder heart than you have this very moment. It is too late for middle aged women to give the world something of the same service they have given their families unless they have exceptional ability or have kept their contacts. Here is a national problem,

ladies—how can women serve their families as they should, yet divert that current of rare ability into impersonal service, when the time comes that families need them no longer? As it stands now, it is futile to educate women unless their lives can be more logical, their education properly demonstrated not repressed. I'm a regular little brochure this evening. Come, Polly, I'll take you home—don't think I've ridiculed domesticity—merely suggested that when you retire into a home, you do not allow yourself to be locked in," she threw on her trim sport coat.

Clearing away the tea things, stopping to refold the gossamer slip, Blair found herself repeating Roxy's words: "To divert the current——"

Tony's step banished reflections. He brought great news—a wonderful country place with two acres, on the edge of a suburb, was to be had for forty-five dollars a month. Think of it! The money saved from leasing Twilldo would pay for outside work. The garden and orchard would set their table. The house had electricity, water and a furnace. There was no gas but one could use an electric grill in summer and a wood range for winter. All the rooms need not be furnished, there were twelve and several halls! There were century old

elms and a flower garden—if one cultivated it. The last tenant had been an eccentric hermit, so the place appeared neglected but a gardener and a cleaning woman would soon correct the impression. What did Blair say?”

“Wonderful,” she agreed.

“Today was a raw day, too,” added Tony, “but I could see what that rambling old house would look like in mid-summer or October.”

Blair was equally deluded by its possibilities. It was inconvenient, damp, dilapidated. The abundance of mice and lack of congenial neighbors, windy halls, sagging floors, the torture of keeping a wood range aglow did not suggest themselves to Blair. Instead, she saw herself exploring second hand shops for walnut tables and marble topped dressers. They would buy rag carpet and ask Aunt Agnes’s permission to loot her attic. Blair was thrilled at the prospect of fresh eggs and vegetables—perhaps their own cow.

“You need the exercise,” she told Tony, “after all that office routine.”

“Indeed, I’m counting on it. I can do any minor repairs. Sundays we can pretend we are on a picnic. The woods nearby must be crowded with spring flowers.”

"I'll have the baby more to myself," said Blair dreamily, "we've lived too close to people here in town."

They leased the White Elephant, as their friends dubbed it, the Judds retorting they had always wanted to be zoo keepers. The first of May saw them within its squeaking portals. There was no janitor near at hand to be bribed into doing extra tasks. Tony was obliged to leave the house by eight ten, walking to the trolley and making his office at nine fifteen. He could not reach home until six thirty. This was an unavoidable fly in the honey. Aunt Agnes hinted that they wished to be away from her, conducting herself with polite curiosity and nobly defending the White Elephant to her inquiring friends. Aunt Agnes's was that form of loyalty towards her relatives which forbids even an honest admission of their mistakes.

"Sold into slavery," was Roxy's terse comment. But she came out, after hours, to help paint floor borders and even Tony acclaimed her a good scout when she devoted two Sundays to cleaning woodwork, lunching heroically off bread and cheese. Polly and Bill were a trifle patronizing and when Muriel drove out in her new car to pity them—

and accept a few fresh eggs—Blair felt resentful towards the entire universe.

She had not been able to estimate all it would mean, how her strength would suddenly wane, leaving her the victim of cruel fears, unjust fancies. Pity infuriated her, so did her friends' overemphasis on the few advantages of living out of town. She rewarded them by being childishly untruthful as to her joy at living in the White Elephant, after which she became anything but hospitable in regard to invitations.

CHAPTER X

BLAIR'S father spent five weeks with them, commuting into town with Tony. When Blair protested her lack of help, her father sent out a low-grade moron of a hired man who promptly set fire to the barn from his pipe. Nothing daunted, he next produced a stout Lithuanian handmaiden, Tilley Ostrich, who fled one night leaving an alarming discrepancy in silver spoons and lump sugar.

Despite closing off five of the rooms, there seemed no end of stairs. Nothing ever looked clean, Blair reflected dismally, as day after day, she struggled through her routine of getting Tony and her father off to town, clearing up dishes, planning the night meal and spending her noon hour lunching inadequately off scraps and wondering what it all meant! Usually, the hired man was a lacking feature at the White Elephant. If there was such a person, there was no maid and Blair was obliged to cook his meals. If there was a maid, there was no hired man and Blair was compelled to take the outside tasks

because the maid "never done nothin' like that." The one time there was both a satisfactory man and a competent maid, a fervent courtship developed with a resultant elopement.

Tony did all he could—as he frequently reminded. Her father paid a liberal amount of board and Aunt Agnes was never lacking in crucial moments. Still, the burden of things fell upon Blair who had so believed she would glory in the fact. She was overwhelmed by the situation which included an uncertain temper, a sallow complexion and a hysterical terror at the coming of her child, which she concealed by a conventional veneer of rejoicing.

Despite her inhospitality, there was a great deal of company. It was such a pleasant drive, people explained. Blair missed the compactness of Twilldo, the community wash lines and Muriel's player piano would have been easy to endure, by contrast. Their company was often composed of Tony's friends. Blair little knew that many times her guests both ridiculed and pitied her.

"And she is a college woman," was the invariable remark, "wonder if she realized what she was up against."

"Aren't you afraid the place is haunted?" Muriel asked, during a July visit for free food. "I'd perish

out here—your nearest neighbor a farmer, at that.”

“I’m glad to be alone,” Blair fibbed, seething with rebellion, “if the house is haunted, I wish I could capture the shades and make them help take care of it.”

It was trying to be dusting Victorian hangovers and have smartly dressed, care-free people drive up to ask if they might picnic on the lawn—was the well water perfectly safe? It was trying to see Tony go daily into the business world, yet have to remain alone with time for too much introspection and self-analysis to make for wholesomeness. It was even more trying to have Tony return, tired and hungry, careless of her situation, neglecting to do any of the “minor repairs.”

Realizing that for a woman of trained mind, domestic drudgery rots the very soul, Blair envied the contented peasant with her Sunday apron of gay embroideries. She would have been more reconciled had Tony told her he appreciated the sacrifice, she wanted to be associated with the very word! But Tony considered her normally, happily circumstanced. He was, at times, dangerously ambitious, nothing was to stop his progress. Truly, his chief incentive was Blair but he forgot to mention the fact.

When he went to Chicago with a business delega-

tion, Blair indulged in morbid reverie. Her dusty copy of *Apology of Socrates* was as near consolation as anything in the White Elephant territory. Re-inspired and confident of his abilities, Tony returned to be annoyed when Blair said:

“Why tell me about it? Probably I would not understand.”

Wisely, he refrained from argument. He went to his aunt's for lunch and told himself he must remember Blair's condition, things at the “farm” had been rather strenuous. But he did not include the adjective which had produced this lack of spontaniety—things were stupid!

In August, Blair bobbed her hair and took to a smock and bloomers.

“My hair took twenty minutes to do—this way, I run a comb through it and I'm presentable. I cannot have wash dresses to laundry and we cannot depend on steam laundries out here. I have to economize in strength. When I wore my gymnasium suit, you liked me, Tony. You said you were glad I was athletic.”

“So I did,” Tony felt reprehensible. “Only, I've been used to you the way you were—er——”

“Do looks count for so much?” Blair was on the verge of tears.

“Never.” For all of a week end Tony was the complimentary gallant. But he offset this by the wilful adoption of a stray dog and then rescuing four kittens from a watery and sensible grave.

Both wondered as to winter at the White Elephant; Blair had the feeling she would be snowed in like survivors of a polar expedition who must languish on an ice cape until a spring rescue. Still, she would have her child. From dread of its coming, she had returned to radiant expectancy. At least she would have a new interest to prevent despicable jealousy of Roxy’s freedom and Polly’s romance, even Tony’s untrammelled career. She was fearful lest anyone suspect this, she praised everything Roxy and Polly said or did and told Tony that she expected marvellous things of him—“my, such marvellous things, Tonibus!”

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In September, Blair’s daughter regarded the world with large, bright eyes and became gymnastic with colic immediately afterwards. A month later, having named her Beatrice to avoid either Agnes or Blair, Mrs. Anthony Judd was ready to discount vigorously Hugo’s statement that “a woman’s last doll is her first child.”

This barbarously behaved, ravenous young woman had succeeded in capturing her mother's heart and now seemed bent on demolishing her brain.

"Here we are," Blair wrote Roxy, in dire need of confession, "living respectively but not respectably in this barnacle—one handsome husband, one weary wife, one maiden aunt bent on ruining my child's schedule, a heavy footed, fragile brained maid who gets mixed up with all of us. Food is always raising a crop of green fuzz in the ice box, there are new kittens. I have lost my identity—and two teeth—I almost believe it does not matter. You see how far gone I am? I'd be content to wear wrappers and lean over the fence to whisper, 'We fry ours in lard.' Once, years ago, I loved the poor and devoted an hour weekly to helping them emerge. Now, I realize how superior—and secure—they must have felt!"

CHAPTER XI

By November, Blair was stiffled by the increasing duties. It was a distinct shock, besides, to discover that Tony seemed proud of being a father only when Beatrice chose to be asleep.

Romance was ended. Tony must have proper sleep, his aunt insisted. She also insisted that it did not matter when a baby slept or was fed if only "the poor mites did not cry—just let the old specialists be treated like they advised helpless infants to be and see what they would soon enough say!"

So Tony betook himself to the closed wing, enduring a poverty of surroundings that the nursery wails might not rouse him. When Blair, falsely alarmed, would call him in the night, he was vehement in disapproval and utterly useless. In the morning—after his second cup of coffee—he was certain Blair had done the right thing, a mother's instincts never failed, which was one way of saying that a mere father must not sacrifice sleep.

At times, he regarded his daughter proudly.

"You're a great old lady," he would say, "what revolution is brewing in your topknot? Think you'll make a stir, don't you? Keep your mother stepping to stay in line with you—where shall we enter her, Blair? Oh, you haven't got that far? Well, we'll send you off somewhere, old lady, train you to tell folks what is what—yes, we will—hi, Blair—hurry—to speak with elegance, Bea's regurgitating!" Which ended any conversation with Tony's great old lady.

When Tony stayed in town over night, with good reasons and always after an endearing telephone to that effect, Blair would trudge down to the gourmand of a furnace and shovel on coal, her bobbed hair flying rebelliously about her thin cheeks and her body numb despite the bathrobe and steamer blanket. Then she would climb back to resume her care of the great old lady. Beatrice had no intention of remaining unnoticed. She was a lusty, roaring member of the family who made known her demands so vigorously that Blair relaxed her scientific schedule.

During these nights, Blair would wonder just what fatherhood ought to mean. A proud reserve prevented calling attention to Tony's lack of personal effort. She even lulled herself with the sentimental

fallacy: "Very well—when his child grows up and is a stranger to him, while I have her confidence—he will have but himself to blame. I have been faithful and in the end my reward will be accordingly."

Once, staying in town overnight, Tony breakfasted with Roxy. He had met her returning from early court and she insisted that he drive with her to her flat where she composed an excellent omelette.

"Wasn't that nice?" he asked Blair "you have to hand it to Roxy, no matter how eccentric she appears. Her brains are life size."

Blair had spent a wakeful night with a teething daughter. Another time, she would have thought the breakfast a lark.

"I am glad you were satisfied," her lips curving downward as if to repress a sob.

"Why, lovely, you don't mind. It was your friend. If I hadn't been trying to economize, I wouldn't have bumped into her at a crossing. Was Bea bothersome? Is that it?"

Blair's eyes narrowed into dangerous slits of light. "I had about one hour of sleep. I had to fire up three times and wait to reverse the draughts while the wind howled like an invading army. I don't believe you realize how hard it is—this is not

the sort of a life you expected me to have, is it? Or am I mistaken?" She was both unreasonable and tired.

"You know better," he accused, both oblivious to their daughter's cries for attention. "Incidentally, my life is not what I planned or expected. I don't suppose planning is the wisest sort of an indoor sport. We thought coming here would be best for everybody. I did not realize what commuting meant or how ramshackle the place is. I wish I could make a fortune overnight, you'd see how fast I'd spare you any drudgery. But I wish you would realize," his eyes were resentful, "I am no lounge lizard. I keep my best foot forward. These are the years we must work and endure—we can sit aboard our yacht and sentimentalize over them later on. I must make my mark by the time I am forty-five or I'm done—everyone would bear me out. I must do the frontier and foundation work now—and I can't do that and stay home to tend the baby."

His words produced a numbing, unpleasant effect. Blair was overcome by a sense of her shortcomings, Tony's nobility. She was a hysterical shirk, underbrained, no doubt college had been a grave mistake—it exaggerated and camouflaged

her moron tendencies, gave her the courage of her ignorance. Tony was a superior husband. Despite this mental flaggellation, Blair still rebelled.

“If I don’t make my mark by forty-five, I’m done,” Tony truthfully stated. He must do the frontier and foundation work now. Well—what of Blair? If she remained at the White Elephant with incompetent help, remaking clothes, resigning from organizations, stagnating from lack of mental stimulus—would she have any chance of making her mark after she was forty-five? Does any woman? Would not her family, for whom she had allowed intellectual cobwebs to cover her brain, suddenly discover her reddish hands, her rusty wit? Of what use would have been this education? Blair Norcross, honor graduate, talented, idealistic, ambitious, had married Tony Judd and now they lived at the White Elephant where Blair washed baby flannels and sometimes floors! She was using her wedding gown for her party frock and she no longer composed sacred songs or tried to write advertising articles!

The upshot of this reverie was a womanly sedative: “If I have made it possible for Tony to succeed, I shall not regret the hours I have spent with my hands in icy water looking over his nourishing

vegetables! Back of everyone who succeeds is the someone who has made it possible."

Despite her love for Beatrice, the child brought her little pleasure. She had been unused to submerging personal desires to a baby's stupid yet exacting needs. To a degree, Tony expressed her own mind state when he said he was not thrilled over his daughter while she was in a "slug stage." Blair reproved herself for this impatience, she was developing a neurotic conscience these days, as well as accumulating a box of distasteful yellow soap ends under the vague impression of being thrifty.

The Sterlings drove out to take Blair and the baby for a drive, during which Muriel advised Blair to return to civilization, she often saw Tony in town—he seemed as handsome and debonair as ever.

"Poor girl, she looks as if she had been rained on," she told Oliver, as they drove away, "picture little Muriel in her stead!"

Properly trained, Oliver replied he would not permit such a transition.

"It was not Tony's idea altogether," argued Muriel, "Blair could have stayed in town but she is queer. Over-education makes frumps sooner or later. She mooned about wanting nature—and read

the craziest books. It seems unwomanly to my itey bitey mind for a girl to translate Greek and collect statistics as to degenerates! Besides, they are apt to have to wear glasses. Blair has the oddest ideas—I took her to see a hundred thousand dollar production of oriental dances and she said, I'm afraid the people nearby could hear, 'I wish every boy and girl could be placed in a life class before they are twenty. They would never be intrigued by this sort of thing. A nude woman is the most chaste, beautiful thing in the world, a half nude the most indecent.' Now, I ask you—"

Ollie absent-mindedly agreed. He was bent on reaching the Tiptoe Inn to seek out the proprietor and convince him that he was a friend of the brother-in-law of the man who brought the inn tonsil varnish right over the border—and what could Mr. and Mrs. Sterling expect this afternoon?

CHAPTER XII

THE second anniversary was a dismal affair. A January freeze wrecked the plumbing; Blair's father was away. Aunt Agnes had taken up her post at the White Elephant until things should be thawed. Tony's tribute was to bring home a derelict, Pat Towers, who had spent his time either in jail or Alaska and was now east to do odd jobs, legal or otherwise.

Pat protested he liked being in the suburb of a suburb, he could cook, tend furnace and house-keep as naturally as some people could set bones! The anniversary dinner was a strange affair, designed and delivered by Pat "out of my head like" as he explained. He wore someone's second hand golf suit, covered by Blair's pink gingham apron, and shuffled in and out with the dishes, pausing to converse with Beatrice in her bassinet or spread a feast of scraps for the menagerie.

In answer to Aunt Agnes's protest, Blair insisted,

"He is something with arms and legs and he can put on coal and take out ashes and boil potatoes—I refuse to be too critical."

A few weeks later, it was Tony who defended Pat. "I know he chews tobacco, that he cleans, dusts, fairly cooks with but one implement—a turkey wing. That he starts sweeping around midnight and seldom arises before nine. That is due to his Alaskan training, no one up there has an orthodox sense of time. I suspect he has been in jail—he cringes too easily—but we cannot get anyone better at mid-winter."

Pat was inoffensive in many ways, with a dog-like devotion for Blair and Beatrice and a willingness to do anything, if it could be accomplished with his turkey wing. Towards spring, the lure of the road proved overpowering and after a systematic clean-up of Pat's disorder, Blair hung his turkey wing over Tony's desk as a souvenir.

When Polly declared Blair must be her matron of honor at the April wedding, Blair protested.

"I've nothing new to wear—we've had such heavy expenses out here."

"Your wedding dress," insisted Polly, unconcerned with the inner workings of the Judds.

"That would be a pretty idea, too." Polly was all

dimples and confidences and bridal showers these days.

Blair felt wistful. If she glanced in a mirror, she knew how startling would be the contrast between her house dress, her unwaved hair and Polly's modish serge, her golden, marcelled head.

"I hope you'll be so happy, dear," Blair said vaguely, "if you really want me, I'll see what I can do to the old dress."

"We won't have anyone else. Bill saw Tony yesterday—don't worry about not giving me a shower, I know how things are." Blair fancied Polly was patronizing. Wilfully, she insisted she give a luncheon at a hotel, she could leave Beatrice with Aunt Agnes. Polly was persuaded to name the one available date.

"I hope you move back to town," she ventured, "it seems so unlike both of you to be here."

"Don't ever hope," Blair said impulsively. "You'll soon enough find out that things just happen."

"Nonsense, you needn't stay here. I wouldn't slave so for Bill and I adore him. Besides, Bill would not let me—he said so."

Blair bristled at any hinted criticism of Tony. As if Tony was not Bill's superior. Bill who depended

on family backing for his position—as if Bill—she consoled herself inconsistently by thinking Polly would soon enough find out that Bill was like all men, once in his shirt sleeves.

Blair gave her luncheon at the best hotel in town. Proudly, she wore her wedding dress, her enamel bracelet and her mother's sapphire ring. She bought a bunch of violets and accepted the others' conclusion that Tony had bought them. Well, it was Tony's money, Blair told herself. She could not enjoy the luncheon because she would keep counting its cost. She imagined she was being tolerated and pitied—everyone else was so much better dressed, not only their clothes were new but so were their remarks!

Tony was polite in asking for details and telling her not to think twice of the expense. It had been the right thing to do. Some day, they would have a real home and entertain with a receiving line and a string orchestra—why worry now?

Tony had no inkling that Blair felt neglected, out of step with the procession. He rated himself an admirable husband because he paid the bills and made love to no other woman save his wife.

At Polly's wedding, Blair found, to her astonishment, the Sterlings. Muriel confided that she was

making the social grade rapidly. Ollie had made some remarkable deals—it would not be long before the Sterlings would be building their own home. Muriel was both graceful and gracious in a canary velvet creation with a feathered helmet calling attention to her lithsome, attractive self. Muriel received more attention than did Blair, matron of honor.

Beatrice was ailing, so Blair left early to see she had her medicine and an oil rub. Roxy drove her to Miss Judd's, Tony lingering behind to help in the send-off. There was no point to his coming away, he would have been annoyed by the verbal battle likely to be waged between his wife and his aunt.

“Attention, Mrs. Blair,” Roxy began, “you seem to be breeding an extra set of nerves. Pack up the infant's kimono and your nail file, leave Tony to run the ranch while you visit me. I watched you today, you winced and blushed and stuttered until I was ashamed—how is that for frankness? You need a rest from the grind. Keep house in my apartment, let me show you how to give your child some wholesome neglect. Tony is a reasonable boy, if you go at him the right way. Tell him you must have a change and I've asked to treat you to one. You'll disapprove of my way of living, that will

show up Tony in an admirable light. You need contrast."

"I'd love to," Blair admitted, "could we get raw milk for Beatrice?"

"Raw or polished—leave it to me. The thing is to get some pep for mother."

"When would I come?" the idea seemed as alluring as it was impossible.

"Tomorrow—next day," decided Roxy, "did you see your friend Muriel vamping the ushers? What did Tony call her—a semi-demi? Good enough."

"Do you think Polly and Bill will be happy?" Blair changed the subject, Muriel's presence had been a thorn in her flesh.

"I think Polly is the domestic, bridge-playing type who will keep Bill feeling he has done better than he deserved. They are going to London, his father confided, Bill to represent his firm. Polly will have servants and, therefore, time to improve her bridge."

Blair laughed. "If I should visit you, I might get up my ambition to do an article I once planned—how Helen of Troy was the first flapper."

"Day after tomorrow at the latest," was Roxy's ultimatum, "and don't bring a trunk—I'd have to hang it out the window."

An earnest talk between Judd and wife resulted in Blair's accepting the invitation. Tony was disappointed in what he considered Blair's lack of endurance. Still, Blair had been on the job without any breaks, if she wanted a glimpse of Roxy's background, it might convince her that life as his wife was not impossible. Both felt misunderstood and magnanimous when they grudgingly admitted people can see too much of each other—especially under a strictly domestic set of circumstances.

Tony reminded himself that he had been thankful for staying in town now and then. He could not deny the hotel was restful and there was always hot water and an abundance of towels! He could go to the office the next morning with a clear-cut, neutral viewpoint. He hated the image he invariably took away of Blair—hastily dressed, her hair crowded under a mob cap, an abused intonation in her voice as she said: "Goodbye, dear—remember the boric acid crystals, if you please."

No, he would not regret this visit, although she must not suspect this was so. As for living in bachelor bliss, that was easy. He would get his own breakfast and eat in town the rest of the time. He would have uninterrupted time for extra work; Sundays, he would bring out friends to enjoy a day

of loafing. The more he dilated on this, the more the idea appealed. He became tenderly insistent that she go, he resolved to repaint some floor borders and make shelves for her indoor conservatory. He would prove what a hundred per cent sort of husband he was.

Blair's only request was that he did not try to see or telephone her unless it was an emergency. He must pretend that she had really gone away—and write her often.

"Then we may grow sentimental, Tony, completely duped once more."

"Blair," hurt at her bitter tone.

"I mean it. I want to be a novelty to you and to have you a novelty to Beatrice and myself. We want to put the bloom back on the peach—we believe the lily sometimes requires a trifle of gilding. I'm all nerves—I've been a great silly to get myself into such a mental black knot but I've had to learn all new things and learn them quickly—it has told on me, Tony, because I've never stopped fretting to practise the old things. I'm going to stay away until I can come back rested and serene—but you must stay away, too. I've gone to no-man's land."

CHAPTER XIII

WHILE Tony was a reckless zoo-keeper, writing Blair daily and with increasing, sentimental concern, Blair was re-discovering the interesting old world she had never expected to lose.

Roxy's apartment was the type of fireproof torture containing a wall bed which became a writing desk and bookcase by day, the dining room was compressed under a window seat, springing up into a pullman table and bench while the telephone, concealed under the alluring skirt of a doll-lady, was also the top of the china cabinet. It was so compact and dual, Blair would not have been surprised to see the bathtub fold up into a handsome portrait of a water spaniel. Still, lack of space had its compensations. It did not indicate lack of ideas nor produce aching feet from toiling up and down stairs and winding hills. Roxy was located so one could walk to the stores and theaters, there was a superabundance of noise and a lack of trees but Blair's

weary mind did not take note of these discrepancies until June came and Tony's letters outdid those of their engagement days.

Beatrice approved the new arrangement. By nature a cosmopolitan, she enjoyed the attentions of various, strange persons who, in turn, enjoyed the novelty of a baby for a tenant. Roxy did not permit Blair to be any trouble. Purposely, she asked her to do the housekeeping while she went about her business with marked regularity. When she asked Blair to go some place or if she would like to have people in for tea and Blair refused, Roxy never argued the matter. Blair was to do as she liked even to washing and dressing that ridiculously attractive infant several times daily.

Nor did Roxy pretend to help with Beatrice. She had every intention of being fond of Beatrice when the latter arrived at the civilized stage of not putting everything into her mouth. In turn, Blair comprehended Roxy's reactions.

Sometime it was a religious cult to which Roxy took her, Blair feeling as if she were in a theological five and ten cent store; sometimes, it was a racey *matinée* over which Roxy laughed and Blair debated—ending with laughter, too. Or it was one of Roxy's settlement clubs where Blair was asked

to start the evening's fun or a civic meeting or an interior decorator's studio where Blair basked in riots of color and symphonies of design. Roxy even coaxed her to come to court sessions, she made her eat at bohemian cafés where you were apt to find your coffee cup had been filled with pale claret, she forced her to pour tea for the college club's last at-home for the year and to translate the French pantomime the little theater wanted to put on. There seemed no angle of impersonal, progressive life which Roxy did not introduce to her guest. When Blair had hesitated about leaving Beatrice asleep in the apartment, with no one on guard save the cuckoo clock, Roxy insisted:

"She's in that crib thing, over which I've fractured a few ribs—and if she wakened, she'd howl and strengthen her lungs or stuff deadly poison in her mouth and it would act as a tonic—the little monopolist."

Blair was loath to try it. She had never done it before.

"If she can get that kind of room service from her mother, I don't blame her," ridiculed Roxy. "But you are foolish to be submerged before your child is a year old—it usually happens when they are around eighteen. Let's ask the janitor's wife how many

ducats she needs before she will keep a weather eye on Bea."

After a little, Blair took this kind of thing as a matter of course. She was eager, too, for the postman's ring. Tony's letter was certain to be in the box. When Roxy left for the day and Blair changed the bed back into a desk and made Beatrice a white of egg dessert, she would answer his letter—with crosses for kisses, at that! She had things to tell him, not whines about the dog tracking her recently mopped kitchen, why was he late, she could not keep things tasting as they should—no, her day had been very stupid—the only event being the chance to buy a washing machine.

She was thinking how summer would beautify the old house, how Tony would smile when he lifted Beatrice and learned how much she had gained. Beatrice disproved the theory that occasional apartment house life was productive of mal-nourishment. She seemed brighter with different people running in and out—it had been somewhat dull at the White Elephant for this "great old lady."

Roxy did not relax her schedule. Roxy, herself, demanded that things happen. Her nervous energy would not permit solitude unless some cataclysm had taken place. Capable, fearless, she worked for

the cause, not the reward. Few organizations which did not ask Roxy to join them; as someone said, "Miss Hubbell is ninety-nine per cent efficient—one per cent human."

Forgetting Roxy's childishness when she was ill, Blair resumed the hero worship which Tony had interrupted. She also ceased to worry over Aunt Agnes's disapproval of this visit. Why must Blair visit only a few squares from Tony's office yet forbid him to come near, although she trotted about town with this Roxy person, leaving Beatrice to the care of a janitress! She secretly believed it was due to over-education. Poor Tony! He even refused to let her come to the White Elephant and have it cleaned. Aunt Agnes longed to make the place spotless—for Tony's sake. But Blair had anticipated this possibility and requested otherwise. Whenever his aunt protested this strange vacation, Tony waxed eloquent in Blair's behalf.

Roxy had coaxed her to stay until after the eleventh of June, in order that they attend the luncheon and annual reunion of their boarding school alumnæ and to allow Roxy to go to a woman's conference in Cleveland, during which Blair was to attend to Roxy's personal work. There were committees to report to and a speech read at a directors' meeting

of a working girls' home. Blair was thrilled at the prospect. She had been like the small boy sitting beside the chauffeur, yearning to take the wheel.

The boarding school which both girls attended had been an orthodox city affair with much formality and little fresh air, the constant urging of pupils to apply the acid test before speaking or acting: Is it right—wrong—vulgar?

As Blair studied the room of guests, she realized they comprised a different type of woman than her college *alumnæ* afforded. But a small percentage of Mrs. Bishop's graduates attended college, the majority married, a few went abroad for art or music. They were the well to do, sheltered home women of conservative views, prosperous husbands. Their wealth was neither ostentatious nor advantageous, so Roxy observed. Few smoked, everyone went to church, almost all were for suffrage but against feminism, they belonged, *en masse*, to the humane society, the red cross—and an afternoon bridge club. They were devoted to their families and went to New York with them to obtain the best in drama and clothes. The 1878 graduates seemed lovely cameos. Blair admired their white hair under dignified hats, unrouged, well preserved cheeks. This atmosphere was relaxing after Roxy's smoke-

ridden socialists who were bent on upsetting the universe because they knew someone else would come along and right it. These matrons chatted of débutant daughters, the way silk stockings had retrograded in quality, auto-suggestion, the rector's neuritis, the income tax.

They had a reminiscence programme, while eating oyster patties and salted almonds. It seemed light weight to Blair. She wondered how many present arose during a zero night to fire up the furnace, struggle with a Pat Towers or a Tilly Ostrich, she wished they would stop asking where she was to spend the summer. When everyone rose in turn to give both their maiden and married names in order to be definitely identified, Blair merely whispered:

"I am Blair Norcross Judd," although she was forced to smile at Roxy's bold:

"I am Roxy Hubbell Always," which won a faint laugh.

That night, having given the baby her place card to devour, Roxy left for the West. Blair enjoyed playing understudy. She did the extra clerical work with Beatrice sliding off her lap, she took her to the working girls' home and left her in a matron's lap while she read Roxy's report; Beatrice clutching her hat and producing a dissolute slant, she invaded

the district attorney's office to call for Roxy's personal mail. What delighted Blair was this brief proof that she could do Roxy's work—although Roxy could not do Blair's. With this satisfaction, Blair was content to tell Roxy goodbye and be driven out to the White Elephant where she would surprise Tony that night.

All the way home, she was telling herself, "I am no longer stale and stupid—but poor Roxy has no Tony or Beatrice, nor could she care for them if she had. Joy of joys, we are going home." She was absent-minded when Roxy set her down before a neglected looking porch.

"You have been a life saver," she said carelessly, "and you're to come out for our first strawberry shortcake." Unlocking the door, Blair confided to her daughter, "My love—we are home!"

CHAPTER XIV

BUT she discovered her house had been inhabited by a pig, not a poet! Author of her daily effusions it was true—but Tony had allowed grocery and drug supplies to become nil, dust to thicken on every article, unsavoury fragments of ham, egg shells, olive pits, cheese rinds, and dozens of mineral water bottles to ornament the kitchen and dining room. His bed resembled a dugout fortified with crumpled linen and detective stories. There were numberless details worthy of indignant exposure.

Blair sat Beatrice in the least dusty spot, donned an apron and began renovation. Roxy had telephoned Tony that certain parties were suspected of having arrived at his house—he better go home and see about it. Innocent of his shortcomings, expecting a romantic Blair, Tony bought flowers, got a shave and hair cut, a toy for Beatrice and arrived at five.

By this time, Blair had removed only the top layer, as she told him promptly. She had washed the

dishes and found enough linen to make the beds, she had sent for a man to come in the morning and beat rugs and wash windows. There was nothing to eat but cereals and bouillon cubes. Fortunately, she had brought along a thermos of milk for Bea. Tony could eat cereals and bouillon cubes or return to town—she wished for nothing save rest. She thought it the most selfish, inexcusable thing he had ever done, she knew now why women seldom left their husbands—returning was too overwhelming.

Convinced he had been an indulgent, lonely husband, Tony's temper asserted itself and there followed one of those violent dialogues which are seldom effectual, always disturbing for days afterwards.

"Your aunt has spoiled you," Blair accused, "never tell me I am the product of a boarding school and family hotels. You must have noticed the dust, the dirty dishes—couldn't you have had someone come in to clean?"

"You told me you did not wish my aunt snooping—yes, that was your careless word—snooping about your house. I tried to do as you wished. Is this any way to greet me? You'd think I'd been running a still. Well, I am going to town and stay overnight. Give me a grocery list and I'll send out the

things on the first delivery. I'm sorry you seem so upset—can't you realize I was here very little and I did not know the exact day you were to come? I was not trained to do housework, Blair, but to hold down a pretty big job."

"So was I," she flung back bitterly, "like many women are trained—only to find we must be satisfied with petty jobs and not complain. It is your selfishness, your aunt's pampering, it is—I almost hate you just now, you are so sleek and shaved and smelly with rose talcum. And then this—this house! I hope Beatrice becomes another Roxy—yes, I do."

It was a week before Blair and Tony decided both had been right, both wrong. Blair should not make such extravagant statements, Tony should have kept a semblance of order and had sense enough to bring in a cleaning woman without telling his aunt. He had had good news to tell Blair, too—but no man would have told it under such heavy fire, such a harangue—yes, harangue. To have his lovely almost screech at him! What were cigarette butts and cheese rinds compared to their love! Thank goodness, Bea was no older, to have had her understand and remember would have been a deep humiliation. What good had the vacation accomplished if her

nerves snapped off like this—well, his news was he was raised to three hundred and fifty a month—he was buying stock which bade fair to double itself before long. Oh, yes, miserable degenerate that he was in her eyes, he had been considered worthy of advancement by the firm. Now was he to be scolded because he had forgotten to rinse out his tea towels?

To celebrate, they went to town for dinner and the theater, spending the night with Aunt Agnes, who was magnanimous in her welcome. Blair was conscientiously unhappy about the happening. She could not forgive the state of her house any more than her own lack of self-control. She agreed to everything Tony said, congratulating him on his success with such sincerity, that he resolved to buy her a reckless Christmas present.

Judd and wife experienced another hades of a summer, Tony declared, despite Blair's vacation and the enlarged income; help remained impossible and Blair's father spent his summer with them, oblivious of the additional work. Beatrice celebrated her grandfather's arrival by cutting teeth in groups of two and three, with as much protesting and as little sleep as any case on record. The Sterlings were at the shore, Roxy was out West, Polly and Bill in London with Polly writing about her "trim maids

and funny little buttons to do the knives and boots—you don't mind being damp and antiquated when you can tap a bell and have someone come do whatever you like."

Blair found herself a trifle morbid when they left the White Elephant that fall, subleasing it to Slavs who were delighted with its possibilities. Blair was expecting another child, which in itself precluded their staying through another winter. Not ready to buy, they found what Tony termed the Bungahigh, a new, stucco affair atop a corkscrew hill known as Hillside Terrace, a one family development tract built and largely owned by Peter Cabana, self-made and advertised contractor.

Having failed to sell the Bungahigh for over a year, its alarming cracks and sagging floors caused him to rent it for seventy-five dollars a month—six small rooms, a suggestion of a sun porch, a garage, a red tile, leaking roof and a pigmy pine tree which caused it to be referred to as "the little home with the landscaped grounds."

CHAPTER XV

BLAIR became optimistic over the moving, even if the expense and effort of being settled and buying new things were no small items. They were back in town, she had hardwood floors, steam heat, base plugs for her lamps. She could go to things and have day help. Ambition rekindled. Beatrice would be quite a toddler when a brother or sister should join the family. Tony was succeeding as fast as it was safe to succeed, one of the firm had them out for dinner and hinted he expected big things from Tony. Life was fairly satisfactory.

When Tony bought an oriental rug for the living room and surprised her with a cloud of pink tulle, commonly known as an afternoon frock, Blair felt that life was rather interesting.

By November, she was on speaking terms with her neighbors and their name listed in the telephone directory. Peter Cabana, who lived in a magnificent affair on the crest of the hill, had called twice, his

limousine parked democratically in the drive. Their chimney refusing to draw and several bolts and nails dropping from their intended positions, Mr. Cabana had been a self-appointed committee of investigation.

He was a sandy haired, florid complexioned person, his lavish smile featuring several gold teeth. He styled himself a friend of the under dog, nor was he ashamed of having been a poor boy and without "book education." He had scoffed at society until recently, when he joined a man's club and became passive on the subject of snobs. He boasted he was a friend of all the children but his home contained none of them. He liked to play cards and flirt with the wives whose husbands purchased his altruistic homes. There had been rumors concerning certain of these flirtations but nothing definite ever developed. Cabana's first wife had been cook in a wealthy family. It was Katrinka's savings which built the first two family flats but she never enjoyed their profits. She continued to "eat work" as Cabana complained. After ten years of wretched unhappiness, she died and Cabana, having seen that she was insured, used his increased capital to build an office block. But he was not content to re-marry unless his wife insured him social advantages.

He startled everyone by bringing home an unattractive but cultured gentlewoman as his next choice. Of excellent family but no means and wearied of teaching school, Miss Lowden had rashly agreed to marry this man whom she thought to be a childlike person with splendid possibilities. Although this wife soon became a neglected invalid, she had socially erased the fact that the first wife had been a cook. But in helping Cabana, she met her own Waterloo. Behind closed doors, he called her "old maid" and mimicked her niceties, saying he was a fool for having married her on the strength of her ancestors—a tutor would have done him just as well. If his first marriage had been for money, the second for learning, his third should be for love! Did she understand?

Cabana found Blair an enigma. She was rather attractive, if properly dressed, yet indifferent to him although aware that he was Peter Cabana and his time meant money. He considered her taste in furnishings too "pale" and she had spoilt her child. His first call was brief, due to the fact that Beatrice was having dinner, wallowing alternately in mashed potatoes and custard. Blair made it clear this was not her leisure hour.

The second call found Beatrice asleep, a fire of

birch logs struggling to burn and Blair in her new pink silk dress. The setting pleased him.

"How I love a home woman," he began, "take these crazy, advanced creatures out of my sight. I'm older than you, little girl, I can talk as if I was your dad. You keep your mind on your home and your husband and you'll come out winner. I've seen too many young couples end by that horrible menace to civilization—the divorce court. Why? The woman did not keep her interest in her home. My own home—ever noticed it—is not a real home, I'm telling you in confidence—ah, me, there is nothing finer than love——"

Beatrice took this interesting moment to awaken and Mr. Cabana fled, telling Blair no landlord was required to refinish perfectly good floors—he was amused at her request.

CHAPTER XVI

"MR. CABANA could be vamped," Blair told Tony. "If I had drugged Beatrice, he might have made us storm windows."

Tony knew Cabana. "The old fox—did he know you had his number?"

"I was out-Murieling Muriel. I must—if we're to be comfortable. What sort of neighborhood is this? I've not thought very much about it—have you?"

They were enjoying the open fire before which Mr. Cabana would have liked to linger.

"Ambitious bromides," Tony answered, "gold fish or ferns in every den and a tapestry suite for the living room. I'll not see much of them. Anyway, this is not a permanent home. What do we care? It is nice just to be alone yet not in the wilderness," Tony was truly content. "Do you know, Blair, I'm still crazy about you?"

Blair threw him a kiss and went on with her sewing.

"We grow happier as we go along, too. I lunched with Sterling today—he said they have bought a hundred and fifty foot frontage on the North Boulevard and are going to build—Cabana is the contractor."

"Fancy Muriel! How she will 'understand' this great hearted hero!"

"Ollie must plunge," Tony insisted, "he gets money somehow—wish I could," his eyes were strained and suggested discontent.

"I wouldn't trade places with Muriel." Blair was not alarmed. "Would you with Oliver? Come, Tony, this doesn't sound like the real you."

"I'd go the lead pipe limit if I ever started plunging," he flung out. "If I ever grew discouraged with this even pace—and wanted things."

"Why, Tony, how foolish to waste time this way—when you've made me so very happy."

Tony reached over to take her hand. "Blair," he began boyishly, his tone told her what he had to say was difficult, "would you be patient a little longer—say for a year or two—to help me get on? Oh, if you only knew how I hate to ask it."

"What do you mean? Of course I'll be patient and trust you."

"About help—and extra money. You said things

were so compact and convenient here that you could manage in half the time and——”

“True—but I want to do personal things this winter—what is it dear, don’t keep me waiting?” anxious tears blurred her blue eyes.

“Then here goes. I’m leaving the firm in January to start for myself. I’ve a chance to borrow money and sell my stock. The combination gives me enough capital. I’m convinced now is the time. If only we can be economical in the home—it won’t be for long and, lovely, I’ll more than make it up to you when I get my stride.” He looked away from her as if dreading to see her mental struggle.

The plan startled her—she did not feel that Tony was justified in leaving Carson and Scott. It was not quite fair to her—at just this time.

“Prove your trust by helping me,” he begged, “I bank on it.”

“I’m afraid,” she began, “I—I mean I’m so eager to——”

“You mean you are not with me—you, who have always planned on my own agency where I could use my own methods?” He stood up in surprise. “You can’t object to keeping down the house expenses when I’m risking everything I have, assum-

ing all the responsibility—I, a husband and a father—and wanting to make good just for you? Blair, are you sure you realize all this means?”

Blair laid her head on his shoulder as if unwilling to hear her own surrender. At this turning point in her husband's career, she must put aside personal desires.

“I'm with you,” she said in a muffled tone, “you must count this very dress as my premature Christmas present.”

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Blair's surrender of personal desires was like tropical twilight, where the brilliant afternoon sun dims and night takes its place—without any interval of tender pinks and lingering blues. Blair became fanatical on the subject of being square with one's husband. She dissembled to her friends on the rare joy of sacrificing for one's family. After the first flush of gratitude, Tony became careless of what Blair's economy entailed. He was indifferent to her lack of outside interests save as they concerned himself. His love was a loyal, limited emotion—after all, Blair had become the youthful personification of his aunt's devotion.

Blair had abandoned intimacy with her neighbors.

They were perfectly good people but there was nothing in common in the world of ideas. Blair termed them the "daddy-women"—small, sharply pretty persons or else the pale, helpless type, who never spoke of their husbands but always "our daddy" and who called their children "my kiddies"; with this re-naming of the family unit went a peculiar interpretation of the social scheme. They were afraid of the dark or to stay alone at night. They had never recovered from the terrors—and attentions—of childbirth. They exacted daily homage from "our daddies" for this superb feat. They adored candy, clothes, card clubs and Mr. Cabana. They boasted of his driving them home. They called him a naughty dear and said they would never tell "our daddies" how he squeezed their hands. They had washing machines, vacuum cleaners and other modern appliances enabling them to emerge by two in modish attire. They were content to let "our daddy be brains enough for the family." If "our daddy" was a college man this gave them added pride and coquettish self-abasement. Their homes were furnished according to the department stores' best tastes. A brave rivalry as to flat silver, our daddies' neckties and talking machine records existed. Every second Thursday, they had

a neighborhood sewing club. Blair did not join the Stitchery but suggested a Monday reading club for contrast. This was vetoed, the consensus of opinion being that "Shakespeare was vulgar—and Monday our wash day." They considered Blair a hi-brow who had to do her own housework. Besides, the Judds were only renting.

Mr. Cabana's visits had lessened when Blair met his wife and became somewhat friendly. Roxy came out but seldom, the hill was too bad for her four cylinder. Aunt Agnes came faithfully but Blair was constantly apprehensive lest she hurt the older woman by modernism, criticism of Tony's new departure. She found herself stale, re-living her college past, just as Aunt Agnes lived over her girlhood to everyone's boredom. Blair was forced to exist on memories of when she had been a free agent—and her typewriter stood on her own desk. Sometimes, she wished she could become a "daddy-woman," she had a dreadful suspicion that Tony might have approved the change!

Her son came. The professionally enthusiastic nurse had never seen a finer little boy but Blair, deaf to the praise, looked into her son's blindish eyes and realized the years of exacting care which were his due and her duty. Then the confiding stir of

her flannel bundled child kindled the strange, enduring flame of mother love and selfless ambition. Blair knew the odds were against her. Tropical twilight had given place to the long night!

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Blair's son was four years and three months old, the long night ended. Tony, whose business had succeeded fairly well, neglected to keep his generous promises. He had taken for granted her position at home—the home of Judd and wife. Naturally, business was his chief concern even if it required him to go to Muriel Sterling's to dinner. Oliver had asked in some important business men. He felt Blair always understood, bless her, she was never petty or nagging. He often wondered how she did things so well—his mind running back to Twilldo where cooking was barbarous but romance rampant.

To Blair the long night seemed a period of being only a robot. Her bravest feat had been to set out tomato plants and tend them carefully, writing an article describing the process from the original cost to the destination of the last green tomato refusing to ripen in her kitchen window. She received five dollars for the article and snapshots with which

she bought an aluminum kettle and a book on rugs! She was amused at her diverse interests which doomed her to defeat. Tony was proud of the tomato venture. After telling the story a few times, it became a joint idea: "We wanted to see how well it would go!"

The Sterlings, established in their new home, paid them scant attentions. Beatrice having reached a reasonable age, Muriel had taken her to drive, curled her soft hair, taught her sophisticated limericks to be recited before equally sophisticated friends. Blair's objection to this had resulted in a coolness. Then came the invitation to Oliver's stag dinner.

"You know I disapprove of the Sterlings," Tony had explained, "but I must meet Dennis Faxon—he owns a chain of grocery stores from here to Denver. Think what the advertising contract would mean! And I'm ready with ideas, too. This social introduction may lead to remarkable opportunities—no, not that tie, Blair—the little one. Beatrice, I'll spank you if you touch my hat again—I thought you could be trusted! This house is not big enough to change your mind in——"

"True," echoed Blair as she banished Beatrice to a corner and undressed her son for his bath.

Tony enjoyed the party, he admitted to Blair.

The Sterlings knew how to do things. Muriel had looked in on them—she wore a stunning, green-gold affair and exquisitely matched pearls. He wished Blair would call on her—why have a coolness—she must be more cosmopolitan. (Was there a hole in the screen—how the flies came in!) After all, this was a great opportunity and he appreciated it—Faxon had seemed impressed.

Blair pretended to fall asleep. But she was visualizing Muriel in her green-gold creation, insincere, wholly charming. She could picture Tony's well groomed self as he paid her homage. And the pearls—that caused a sorry memory. A stray gust of vanity caused her to ask for a string of near pearls on a long ago birthday. Affable but prudent, Tony told her a hundred dollars was his limit and she must forego a number of concerts and lectures if she wished him to be ready to spend this amount. After weeks of harmful self-denial, Blair announced she would name each pearl "my Paderewski pearl" or "my current events lecture pearl" and so on, the result being a rosary of intellectual deprivations and a string of beads upon which her son cut his teeth—until she was forced to throw them away. Blair had "burnt the house to roast the pig."

She began counting the number of times, since

they lived at the Bungahigh, that she had gone out with Tony socially. She could count—but why be numerically tragic, she asked in aimless self-communion? She raised herself on her elbow to watch Tony as he slept—and snored. But since it seemed inevitable that one must be something—why the family doormat? She dropped back on her pillow with a sense of shame at the complaining thought. A moment later, she reached over to brush Tony's forehead with her lips, the same maternal spirit prompting the caress as made her slip in during the night to see if the children were properly tucked up.

“You nice, selfish person,” she thought, “how can I make you understand?”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Sterling dinner bore worthy fruit for Tony. He was given an opportunity to go to London as American advertising expert for a recently purchased line of food stuffs. These were in need of modern exploitation. The trip would take about three months, it was an opportunity no man could ignore. Tony knew how jubilant Blair would be over this good fortune, of course she could not come with him but he would bring her an armful of presents and later on, when he had his real home and a bank account which could be spoken of respectfully, he would take Blair and the children for a tour of the world.

Blair was not as enthusiastic as Tony might have wished but his own exuberance of spirits prevented too critical analysis. She would miss him so much, he explained to himself, she was trying to be reserved, stoical. He would miss her—still, he would be among new and interesting backgrounds.

“Don’t worry about us,” she said, when the time

for leaving was near. "We will be quite all right. I'll even promise to be pleasant to Muriel. We'll write you for every steamer and wait for your coming back."

They might have been pals rather than husband and wife, this parting was such a dispassionate affair. Tony felt Blair ought to have cried—his aunt did! His father-in-law went to see him sail. The neighborhood was awed and curious, several of the "daddy-women" called to see how Mrs. Judd "was standing it." Personally, they did not believe in long absences between man and wife—and London of all places!

Blair was graciously uncommunicative. Only to Roxy and a few old friends had she hinted her own plans, secure in their approval. Aunt Agnes was divided between joy at Tony's opportunity and fear of shipwrecks. Blair's father told her she had a husband who never overlooked a good thing, he was glad Blair was such a sensible little soul. Together, the Judds were the wholesome sort that kept the old world wagging.

Mr. Cabana called, after Tony had been gone a few weeks, to find Aunt Agnes had taken the children for the day and Blair was alone. Blair had been relieved at the former's departure. When Aunt

Agnes was about, the entire atmosphere of her home was changed. Mother's discipline and auntie's indulgence were as oil and water.

Mr. Cabana, whose wife was making an extended stay with vague friends, was more showily dressed than ever. His new car reeking of luxury and horse power, was parked in the drive.

"You're in luck," he announced, bustling into the living room, "not every woman with a handsome husband rollicking about London and a homespun cavalier at her feet. So glad to have found you at home. You've been too formal with me for years—can't let my girls treat me like that."

Blair fumed while Cabana decided she was nice enough looking, particularly her eyes and teeth, but she needed make-up and modish clothes. He could not abide women whose ankles were not silk encased and who lacked slippers with captivating buckles. Take Muriel Sterling—his thoughts becoming eloquent. He did not know how to approach this self-sufficient young matron, being better adapted to the "daddy-woman" or elderly, sentimental souls. Had Blair been a more favored type, she would have heard his ill-bred confession of matrimonial wrongs. Instead, he plunged into the main topic.

Would it not be wise for Miss Judd, charming

woman, to sell her valuable, downtown property and come live with her nephew? Well he realized Tony's brilliant prospects, he would be first to extend the glad hand when they materialize. Didn't Mrs. Judd think it time to move into a better neighborhood? Of course, in a stage whisper, this neighborhood was restricted and all that but the Judds were outgrowing it! It would be well for Tony Judd to own a smart place—say stucco on hollow tile or Dutch Colonial. Softly, let him explain. He was developing a handsome tract on the outskirts of the city, now was the time to buy while land was cheap. Nothing succeeded like signs of success. To have Judd return from London to this simple home—would it be good advertising? Why not leave the Bungahigh and let him build a new home, on ample terms, it could be as exclusive as the Sterling's—sweet little woman, Mrs. Sterling, was she not?

Blair was forced to disclose her plans. Mr. Cabana left posthaste to inform the neighbors he did not know what was happening to civilization when women like Mrs. Judd left their homes to accept a position as secretary to the vice president of the Champion Knitting Mills. Nor was she intending to get a divorce, either. Had Judd been bluffing

about his success or was Mrs. Judd a discontented rebel? He had talked to her like a father but it had been of no avail. Poor Judd, what a home-coming!

If Mr. Cabana was amazed, Aunt Agnes was overwhelmed even if persuaded to be Blair's unwilling aide-de-camp! For Blair saw no other way unless Tony's aunt would supervise her children's care—at the first, anyway. She would pay her for this no matter how indignantly Aunt Agnes declared she would put the money "right back into the children's banks."

As nearly as Aunt Agnes comprehended, Blair did not wish to give up her home any more than Tony would have wished doing. More than the money, she longed for independent interests, detached contacts such as Tony enjoyed in addition to his family life. These, she considered her right. She had taken a radical step since all reforms must be radical at the outset and gradually work back to the middle pasture. She was happy as Tony's wife but she wanted to make him realize she could be other things. Roxy helped her to obtain the position which paid but twenty-two dollars a week. The money, Blair decided, would be used in paying Aunt Agnes and for her own lunches and incidentals. She would bring the children down town each morning and try

to lunch with them at least twice a week. At five thirty, she would call and take them home for a light supper, which she would be able to prepare. She would have Saturday half holiday and all Sunday at home. She would have her cleaning woman on Saturday and send the washing out. When Tony returned, he must adjust himself as she had had to do several times. When Tony's aunt tried to look severe and ask how she could depend on weather in bringing and calling for the children, Blair fired another bomb. She had sold her sapphire ring to buy a modest sedan. This would be of pleasure to the family besides its business use. Her plans were irrevocable. No one had exclaimed overly much when Tony left his firm to start for himself—had not she an equal right?

For lack of argument, Aunt Agnes cried and got out Tony's baby pictures. She promised not to write him the news. Presently, she found herself rather satisfied at being in the saddle again, of definite use in the world. She had longed to feed and dress the children according to her own lights. She was almost sorry Beatrice went to kindergarten all the forenoon and left a lonesome but good-natured little brother to be amused.

In the first flush of her venture, Blair realized

something was wrong in sending her children to the person who had failed to educate Tony! That is—educate him to a proper realization of what share and share alike should mean. She, Blair, was sidetracking that same task, bent on her own goal.

At first, she had concluded, it had been a false interpretation of romance which was responsible for this useless submerging of women's personalities, then, by force of economic and maternal stress, it became a habit—finally, hopelessness caused them to accept, even pretend to glorify the submerged state.

But no woman ever gloried more than Blair when she saw herself in tailored suit and brave blue tie, her felt hat hiding the bright brown hair. She did not dare really "see herself" in this transformed state until, one Monday morning, she gazed into the speckled slit of a mirror in the asthmatic elevator which lifted her up, up, up to the vice president's office of the Champion Knitting Mills.

From now on, she told herself, it was to be Judd and Norcross!

CHAPTER XIX

LIKE an over zealous neophyte, the first days in the business world blinded Blair's interest in Tony's letters with his ardent plans for return. Once, he had written loverish letters planning her home-coming and she returned to find her house had been occupied by a cave man.

She was not thrilled over his surprises which were to turn Muriel's complexion green, Paris green, so Tony hinted. She was happy in a matter-of-fact way that he had stocked up with winter woolens and she was keenly curious to learn how he had made good in business. She was a trifle confused at having kept her new position a secret. She sent snapshots and anecdotes of the children and when he wrote they could have a car this winter, she took a childish delight in knowing she would drive her sedan to the station.

The rich, autumn calm was indicative of her mental state. She was doubly punctilious and long-

suffering with Aunt Agnes and the children, as if duty-bound to betray no impatience or disapproval no matter what happened. Before long, Blair found herself a sort of story book mother who never ceased smiling—and who was of uncertain calibre. She must not let the children grow away from her, she jealously reminded herself. She must be grateful to Aunt Agnes who made it possible for her to do this exhilarating thing. No matter if her son admitted to three bananas a day and Beatrice announced that if Aunt Agnes allowed them to do so and so, why did mother object—mother had told them to do everything Aunt Agnes said! Blair held reproof in check. She was pioneering, she explained to herself, during which frontier life there must be concessions and makeshifts as well as achievements. She had taken this drastic step with the sole incentive of her own self-preservation. She hoped she was no more selfish than other women, similarly circumstanced—at least she admitted the selfishness or rather admitted that she had come to end of being selfless. Now that she had taken it—and learned to drive in traffic—she tried to gain a perspective and become aware of other forces.

She knew the pussy-willow neighborhood awaited her defeat with eager, wifely hearts. They watched

her sedan go roaring up the hill or brake on the engine going down. They shook their heads and said, "Our daddy would never permit it." They whispered how the cleaning woman worked with more haste than thoroughness and how Blair baked and mended Sundays. From Saturday noon until Monday morning, Blair was a devoted, hectic mother and housewife. From Monday morning until Saturday noon, she was Mrs. Blair Norcross Judd, a competent business employee. Her first pay envelope was as sacred as a medal for heroic behavior while under fire.

When she did not lunch with the children, Roxy or others claimed her for a pleasant hour at the club or a vegetarian grill room. Here, they solved world problems and the proper length of skirts, debated as to art, real estate prices, politics, the impersonal interesting topics which had kept Tony light of heart and for lack of which Blair had grown bitter.

Mr. Cabana bowed but stiffly these days, engrossed with his new land development and obtaining a divorce on the grounds of desertion. The Sterlings were disapproving of Blair's decision. Muriel expressed her views in unflattering terms. Tony was too good-looking not to have many girls

glad to stay home and pretend to darn his socks. Therein lay Blair's error—she had darned them.

Blair's first experiences in the business world were not all beer and skittles. Beyond the few months' employment before her marriage, she had had no direct contact with the activities for which she longed. Secretly, Blair had hoped she would be recognized, without delay, as a master mind, unfairly sidetracked via the kitchen. When Tony returned, her career should be so unquestionably established, he would be overwhelmed and seek her co-operation. If this should be the case, Blair was prepared to be generous!

The first day at the knitting mills eradicated any such ambitions.

"I'm ready to take you through, Mrs. Judd," she was told after she had finished a preliminary selection as to typewriters, foot stools and had decided she must buy a personal drinking cup.

Glancing up, Blair met the curious gaze of an Amazon type of woman dressed elaborately in the prevailing modes.

"I'm Annette Blake," she explained, as Blair waited for further explanation. "You'll see enough of me before you have been here long. I used to be Annie Blake but I promoted myself. A.B. they

call me—sounds like a degree, doesn't it? Well, my college is the good old school of experience—and a little Irish ancestry. I'm forewoman of the sales department and if you don't mind, I wish you'd come right along. I have a big day ahead."

A.B. was over forty and daring anyone to suggest the fact. She was a handsome, savage creature with pale, blue eyes and stiffly marcelled black hair. Her high cheek bones and strong, uneven features lent her a certain distinction which her brocaded henna frock and ankle length jade earrings succeeded in destroying. Her beaded slippers would have been suitable for a ball room and she wore enough rings, real or otherwise, to warrant the office boy's whisper of, "our Christmas tree."

"I'd enjoy going through the plant," said Blair, "that's the right idea, don't you agree? You have a better understanding and conception——"

"You can say it with flowers, if you want, or any way you like," A.B. dismissed her answer airily, leading the way to the stock elevator at the rear. "I've shown so many greenies through—only to have the firm show them out the gate—it seems to me, it'd be as well if they waited until they've drawn a few pay envelopes. Ah, Rudolph Valentino," as a grimy operator slowed up the elevator, "take us

down to the basement and we'll work our way back. Well, Rudolph, how are all the girls—oh, don't tell me you're not strong for them. I saw you at the Center Street Strand last night—with that flurry of curls—you tell that to the camels—,” she winked at Blair, amazed at the lack of reciprocation. “Hullo, Terry,” as the elevator stopped at a lower floor to admit a tow headed flapper in a gay, spotted frock of Normandy inspiration, “What's wrong? Been crying?”

“Oh, I've been up before the boss,” admitted Terry, “not that I care—I can quit when I like and not have to omit my pie à la mode, either! But what gets me is to be jumped on when the others skate by. It is very different when Arline Robson or Miss Williams, some of those educated snobs, that wouldn't wear an after-dinner ring, make a mistake—oh, perfectly excusable, yes, indeed,” imitating the polite employer, “they are college girls—getting experience—dear me! Well, I'd like to know what difference that makes; but because I come in here right from grammar school to work my way up—every time I do some little thing like getting the date wrong or not being on the job at the switch-board, I'm on the witness stand in my own behalf—my Gawd, I wisht I never tried business, I'd have

been further ahead standing behind a counter and letting someone else make the change. I get off here—the treasurer wants me to help him count the petty cash on hand—goodbye, A.B.—you look swell to-day.”

Two shipping clerks, pinch back coats and all, were getting on the elevator while Terry was receiving Miss Blake’s condolences. They stared at Blair curiously.

“This is the vice president’s new secretary,” Miss Blake volunteered. “Mrs. Judd, this is Claude Tile and Oscar Bright and whoever named them knew their business. Hi, Rudolph, let us off here—can’t you remember this long? I’m not going into the basement this morning——”

“You said so,” grunted Rudolph, “six stories back.”

“I said nothing of the sort,” A.B. led the way into a narrow hall, “that man’s brain will never suffer from enlargement—look out for your clothes, Mrs. Judd—but I guess they aren’t the spoiling kind——”

Blair was following through a labyrinth of turns and corners, A.B. rattling on volubly: “I suppose you’d like to know what everything is for and who said so—well, you can’t prove much by me. I’ve

been here so long, I'm ready to fade out the first real chance I'm offered. You get pretty stale and one sided if you stick in business or a mill for over twenty years. I'm admitting a lot when I say that."

Intrigued by her own affairs, A.B. paused in a hallway before entering the first receiving station of the raw materials. "I want to tell you that I know this business from *a* to *z*—now, I don't mean anything personal," her pale, blue eyes searching Blair's face, "but I never have had much use for college women."

"Sorry," said Blair—rather amazed at her own timidity before this dominant, yet unimportant person.

"Oh, I know something rough was pulled off at your house to make you leave everything and take a job," A.B. conceded nobly, "and I'm for you as far as that is concerned. You can count on me for sympathy. If I seem sort of rough, it is because I fought my way up single handed—bare knuckles, too. There isn't an old timer around here who wouldn't bear me out."

"That is mighty interesting," Blair was happy the conversation had taken a less personal tone.

"Sometime I'll tell you a story that would stagger most anybody. I've seen a good many things happen

in these mills—good and bad. Nobody could ever pay me to keep my mouth shut. Before the union was strong, I could call a walk-out and everybody knew I could.”

“Tell me, did you ever get into argument with capital and have them see your side?” Blair asked, “I mean really see it—not an enforced compromise?”

“Oh, I haven’t much use for capital but, sometimes, I haven’t much for labor, either. The whole thing seems to me to be a wet fish that just has to slap the public in the face every so often. That’s because I’m fed up on being in the same job for years. I’ve saved money and been sensible but I’m not sure it gets you very far. I got a front room with an alcove at a good boarding house and more clothes than I have clothes hangers for. But that isn’t what counts—I know—that’s why I’m sorry for you——” They were rounding a dark, narrow corner. The monologue was temporarily discontinued.

Blair hoped they would emerge into a room of mill hands but, instead, they arrived at large, barn-like doors through which trucks were driven.

A.B. resumed the all-absorbing topic. “I’ve had a good many chances to marry and some chances

to have pretty tall fun. But I never considered the last for a moment. And when I thought the others over, I could see the finish. No matter what big wages a good mechanic gets, I'd have to wrap myself around the wash tubs and worry about the seven children having winter shoes. His wages would be just so much and no more—and you have to count on strikes and accidents—and rows! I've seen it so often, I congratulate myself on never falling for it . . . yes, this is the entrance where the stuff comes in—all waps driving the trucks these days—a regular little Italy, isn't it—see the little fellow fussing around with the back tires of that big truck—he is a wonder. Everyone knows he does the work of two men—so he gets the pay of one and a quarter! Liberty and justice for all," A.B. waved an enthusiastic arm.

Blair followed as they passed fire proof doors before which watchmen dozed. A.B. called each one by name, adding some horse-play comment or caustic joke. "That big guy with the plaid cap on is one of the best operators they have—they know it but he doesn't. He has five children and his wife's had to go into the mountains for t.b. They raised him a few months ago but he didn't file any income tax return because he knew his ex-

emptions would let him out of payment. So he didn't see why he had to file the return—you know, he's shy of reading and writing jobs. And do you know, they fined him five dollars! Hear the eagle scream—no, this way—there's nothing new there, that machine grinding up the waste paper makes a devil of a racket——”

Up a flight of stairs and A.B. paused to supplement her life history. “As for marrying men in the office—well,” shrugging her wide, thin shoulders, “they never saw it that way. No use kidding yourself beyond a certain point—I wasn't educated! Say, tell me—I never got any of you accomplished skirts cornered before—just what does this education business do to you?”

Blair hesitated. She felt absurdly inadequate and embarrassed. “You are educated—so am I—we have different fields——”

“Oh, I've heard that in my dreams—they hand us that at the community house where they advertise that everything is free and equal—and then draw one of those invisible lines between the ‘washed and the unwashed’—different! Maybe I am. I know I get as much out of life as some of these hostesses and directors' wives—I wear my best clothes to the office—I dress for myself not

for business. I won't take to a uniform," with a scornful eye at Blair, "and go home to look at my glad stuff hanging in a clothes press for the moths. I encourage all my kids to dress their bravest—be as fine as the cat's cuffs. It helps them stand the days they spend here. I don't know about books but I know human nature and business isn't so much different from home life, when you get down to cases. You can get stale here mighty easy—I don't blame my kids for getting all the fellows they can and going out for jazz and shows. The homely ones that can't go out are always poor workers or bums. You can't make people too much like machines without staging an awful comeback. Here are the storerooms—oh, I wonder how many more times I'll have to take people through, people that never will come down here again. Why, you, for instance, will spend the rest of your life upstairs, taking letters and answering phones and doing the high class stunts. Now what good——"

"But I want to understand what I'm about. It is like running a house," Blair felt she must not appear too much a nonentity, "you cannot order your maids unless you know what they are doing and why. They would fast enough discover your lack. Business is the same, to do——"

"Say, Mrs. Judd, I hope he has to pay well for the children," A.B. interrupted, "when I heard you were coming, I says, 'Girls, there's another good reason why Annette Blake has stayed Annette Blake. She may be lonesome and end her days in an old folks' home—but she won't have to tell the judge her troubles'—well, you won't find this a hard office, they are pretty decent in a lot of ways. They won't ask questions. Why, we had a man on trial for manslaughter and, as he was out on bail, he kept right along here as if nothing was out of whack. After his acquittal, the firm had the good taste not to congratulate him. A few of us gave him a sleigh ride—but we were personal friends."

"I am not divorcing my husband," said Blair suddenly. "He is in London on business and I am looking forward to his return. I owe it to you to say I am not in need of any sympathy. I wished to do something besides my house work because," when she came to putting it into words, her case seemed flimsy, Annette Blake quite like one of the "daddy-women." "I was trained for business and, after a good many years of staying home, I felt I——"

"Oh, you are taking a job away from some

woman who might need it," summarized Miss Blake bluntly. "You're that sort—want your cake and eat it, too. We've had those before. I might add, they usually end before the judge in spite of themselves. A man can't stand too much—here is the damaged goods room, we have mill end sales out of this stock and some of it is pretty good. I conduct the factory sales, so the pick of things are all gone before the public gets the rest. This way —" her interest in Blair became hostile.

They finished the tour without further discussion. It was an abbreviated tour. Miss Blake wanted to spread the news a firebrand was among them. Blair went back to her office to confront her employer. He was a mild, white haired gentleman, a heavy stockholder and a light weight influence in the concern. Usually, he came to business late and was called for by his wife or daughter about three. His father-in-law had been a former vice-president of the United States, upon which connection rested his dignity. Many of his letters were concerned with his personal hobby—old books. Today, he was bent on the trail of an original edition with John Leech illustrations. He was eloquent in his dictation of a letter which offered his London agent a generous sum for the purchase of the same.

After he finished this, he removed his reading glasses and stared at Blair.

"You are interested in advertising, I believe?" he said carelessly.

Blair told him she was, she hoped to work into advertising work in the mills if there should prove a vacancy. She had several theories——

"Now—to Mr. Albert Livingston, 940 Madison Avenue, New York City—Dear Mr. Livingston—I am prepared to offer you one hundred dollars for the 1876-77 Aldine Art Portfolio, if the same be in excellent condition and with the understanding——"

For the second time, personal desires crowded impersonal work off the stage.

The vice president required at least two hours for lunch. Perhaps he had a vague shame at leaving his secretary without any routine work. He gave her a catalogue of the fall goods and asked her to copy it in part. Selecting a pet walking stick, he remarked that it was a fine day and rang for his car.

Blair copied the catalogue aimlessly. She hoped no one else would come in to ask if she was unhappy with her husband or suggest she was unfair in cheating someone else out of a living wage. She

had been unprepared for this personal angle of her position. She had built up, so she admitted, an ideal of a business world into which she should enter, cheered and appreciated. She was discovering that she was in as individual a situation as when she stayed home.

The office boy and a filing clerk came in to enjoy the New York papers and borrow some pencils. They made slighting remarks about the vice president's uselessness, glancing at Blair with curious eyes.

"Any time I'd sink a fortune in old books," said the filing clerk, "do you know he paid three thousand dollars for a copy of the laws of early Massachusetts? What does that get him?"

"He's considered a human book catalogue," bantered the office boy, "an authority on first editions—could you tell what was what right off the bat?"

"Certainly—watch me," taking a glass of mineral water and pointing at the world's almanac, "Little Lord Fauntleroy, if my eyes do not deceive me—by Miss Beatrix Fairfax, illustrated by Sir Walter Scott—soldier's edition—fifty marks."

Giggling, they left the office, Blair wondering if their opinion of the vice-president's new secretary would be as pertinent.

After a few weeks, Blair's work became less mechanical due to the vice president's providential trip south, during which his secretary had to be occupied. Blair's chance to show her interest in the advertising department came to the fore. She was entrusted with getting out a spring sports wear list and by the time the vice president returned, she was too valuable to return to his book-lined office. Another secretary was found for him and Blair given a desk in the ante room adjoining that of the advertising manager.

Annette Blake spoke haughtily whenever they met. The little girl named Terry had married a fellow clerk. The majority of the office force were a trifle distant towards Blair, some were afraid of her, others resented her being married yet working, a few insisted she "was holding out on the truth." The men disapproved yet admitted her ability. She had had occasion to meet one or two of Tony's associates—it had been somewhat awkward to appear that she was doing a logical thing.

But her paramount reaction was that romance, not self preservation or development, was the all-engrossing topic. There was not a girl in the mills from machine operator to secretary who was not eager to be in a home of her own. "Everyone

wants a sheik," as one of them told Blair during a stormy lunch hour when they sent out for sandwiches. "It is the way things always are. You don't know how tired I am of this office, a raise in salary always throws a scare into me. I'm afraid I'm getting so competent I'll end like Annette Blake—well paid—but who'd want to trade places? She never got a bid for anything—the men treat her like one of themselves. It is the ones who can't spell and always cry if anyone calls them that have the beaux—why is it, Mrs. Judd?"

Blair shook her head. "I thought I understood a lot of things when I came here," she said, "but I'm finding out to the contrary."

"They wonder about you," the girl ventured in shy friendliness, "it's a risk to tell people things that other people say about them—unless they are straight boosts. But you are so pleasant I——"

"Do tell me," asked Blair, "I want to know what they say."

"Half think you are dead wrong to work as long as you got a husband to support you—and they all say he is a nice fellow, too. They think you are queer because—well, you seem so serious and the advertising manager told the president you ought to have more money. I was in the office supposed to

be doing some extra typing, that's how I know. The other half are sorry for you—please don't be hurt, they think you are covering up something that is wrong about your marriage and——”

“Do none of you?” demanded Blair, stung into protest, “understand I want to exercise my brain as well as a carpet sweeper? That I have a soul above a frying pan and I want even the finest husband in the world to realize it and share his interests—that the only way I could prove this was to have an impersonal testimony——” she paused, lest she become a self-revealing, self-centered Annette Blake.

The little girl shook her head. “Maybe so—but I told you what I heard.”

The firm, per se, were unconcerned with the personal problems of this new employee. They were interested solely in her ability. No doubt, they saw to it that their wives remained at home, paying their bills and buying diamond bar pins the width of their limousine doors. They told Blair they would advance her the first of the year and one of them asked if she was any relation to Anthony Judd, formerly of Carson and Scott and now in business for himself? When she admitted she was his wife, the member of the firm almost apologized for his

question and rushed off under the impression that he had read something about the Judd divorce.

Most annoying of all was a young Slav, Leon Caspar, who had recently become a shipping clerk and Blair's slave. Leon fulfilled his duties because he was forced to surrender weekly roubles to a mercenary landlady. His real life, he boasted, was one of romantic phantasy in which he fancied he could be poet laureate (and treasurer) of the universe. He wrote insufferable free verse and six and seven act tragedies where everyone of virtue or ideals met with untimely, diabolical deaths. Leon prided himself on being a radical red and inhaling cigarettes. "That congenital hick kids himself around the whole course," was the head shipping clerk's comment.

Leon was not half as deadly as he tried to believe himself. He was a fairly intelligent, underbred fool imbued with self pity due to an unhappy childhood in the foreign quarter of New York City. Having applied himself at night school until competent to become obnoxious at all public debates, he had periodic fits of melancholia during which he threw out dark hints of ending his life or being martyr in some needed bomb-throwing expedition. Whenever he confided this to Blair, she insisted he

was bilious and sent him away with pepsin tablets and firm advice.

Leon fancied Blair, being married yet a wage earner, must harbor tragedy in her heart. Instantly, he wrote a new tragedy embodying these ideas. He was ludicrously faithful in such services as pencil sharpening, purloining the president's footstool, ringing for the elevator, bowing her in and out of the same.

Highly amused, Blair did not take him seriously. Occasionally, she allowed him to come along for lunch where they met Roxy and Leon glowered because he was denied the chance for bombastic monologues. When Blair told him her husband would come home the next Friday and she was to take the day off, he turned sulky and impolite and threatened to go and live at a socialistic colony in the Canadian wilds. Blair was unimpressed by this calf love—she told herself Tony would be amused. When Leon begged for some trifle as a keepsake, before he left for the colony, she presented him with a wornout typewriter ribbon and jeered at his attempted tragic response.

CHAPTER XX

TONY's train came in at three in the afternoon. All morning, Blair worked arranging the house even to cut flowers and preparing his favorite desert, the children dressed in gala attire and remaining with Aunt Agnes at the Bungahigh while Blair drove to the station.

She was not conscious until she stood at the train gateway that she had forgotten to dress in other than her everyday costume. Someway, she felt confused, as one does coming to dinner to find everyone else in formal togs. Still, Tony did not care about clothes, Blair thought, as the train disgorged its passengers and a happy faced, tall man swung down the line, stopping to take her in his arms.

When Blair and Tony were at last free to talk, the family re-union consuming the rest of the day, a heavy silence followed as if neither wished to broach the subject of Blair's new work. Tony had had no time alone with his aunt, since Blair drove her home to allow him to frolic with his children.

Purposely, Blair kept the general conversation concerned with his trip and its gratifying results. She made him out a roaring lion from the time they reached the Bungahigh until he kissed his children goodnight and admitted what a deceptive thing anticipation was! Truly, he was relieved these human interrogation points of his were due to subside. He, who fondly pictured his return, telling them stories, joining in their play, wanted to be alone—with that selfish freedom of a hotel guest who closes the door upon the world whenever he likes and rings for ice water.

Tony's abrupt opinion when he learned Blair was in business, triumphant over her success, was that she needed a certain sum of extra money and felt she could not ask her husband for the same. He could not conceive of her carrying out any drastic programme for an indefinite time. Being Blair's husband, this fact in itself would have weight in causing her to remain at home upon his return. Women could not have a career and a home, that age-old fallacy was not to be transformed into fact by one Blair Norcross Judd. He wished he had persuaded her to send the children to Aunt Agnes and come across with him. He was intolerant of any tolerance regarding the former issue. If there were exceptions

to this law, he was unaware of them. What a blasted way of welcoming a man back from nearly four months abroad. How casual seemed his offerings of Paris lingerie and London tweeds. He felt cheated—an Enoch Arden peeking in the window to find his wife at a typewriter!

He wondered what his aunt thought—had she tried to dissuade her? He was curious to know whether Blair's father knew and approved of this new state of affairs. How spoiled his children seemed, he could have committed his daughter to a dungeon for the way she interrupted and his son was a howling tease.

The Bungahigh seemed stuffy, cheap after the mellowed, old-world backgrounds. He had outgrown it. (So had Blair.) He waited impatiently until he heard the garage door close and Blair, rosy cheeked and expectant, tossed off her wraps and said:

"It is so nice to see you in your particular armchair, Tonibus—let's forget there is a tomorrow morning and juvenile alarm clocks. Isn't it fortunate I found the little girl to do the dishes? I suppose I owe you an apology—I meant to dress up like a boo'ful lady but I was rushed getting everything else done. Want me to go and change now?"

she leaned back in her chair with a distinctly weary gesture.

"Don't bother," conscious he was making a sulky, unsatisfactory impression. He lit a cigar. For a moment, they watched the fire crackle and glow. Tony took advantage of the cigar's loose wrapper to swear and discard it. He decided not to smoke. He wished Blair would begin—surely, explanations were due him. What could she expect him to say?

"We ought to begin talking," Blair finally suggested, "it is after ten and I have so many questions. I can never hear enough about your trip. More and more, I realize what a golden opportunity it has been—you'll reap innumerable benefits for a long time to come. And you have only told me scraps about Polly and Bill—is their house so wonderful? Are they truly content? Have they changed?"

"Yes—yes—and yes—to all three questions. Their house is splendid," this gave him a favorable lead, "it has a charming, old fashioned garden with clipped hedges and live oaks wearing rosettes of mistletoe in their hair. Polly is a picture when she is cutting her roses. The house is quite old and Polly has had the good sense not to change even

the dingy things. I'd like to spend a summer in it. Polly lends herself to the atmosphere, she makes you feel a sliding panel and a ghost walk are part of the household goods. They are very happy in London and Polly is a marvellous wife. She has helped Bill socially—he was a trifle clumsy. But Polly has seen to that—she has dragged him out to meet all sorts of smart people. She devotes herself to Bill and her home——”

“Polly has never been without servants.” Blair watched the fire, her face suggesting a frown.

“Of course, everyone has them over there. But Polly has to see that they do their bit. Her social duties take a lot of time, too—but she goes into it seriously because she knows how it helps Bill.”

The frown changed to a whimsical smile. “Interesting,” was the demure comment.

Tony was restless under this verbal sparring. He plunged into the main subject without further reserve. “Why didn't you write me about—it?”

“Because I felt ‘it’ was a venture and I was uncertain of its success.” She was equally abrupt. “I wanted the chance to prove myself to myself—no letter could have made you understand——”

“Understand what?”

“Don't be impatient,” she was gently serious.

"Men seldom comprehend what it means to go mentally stale. Neither would I, perhaps, if I had not been taught the sort of things which cannot tolerate staleness."

"Of course men go mentally stale—you can go stale ruling Wall street as easily as you can darning socks," Tony flung in impulsively.

"At first I thought our marriage an ideal arrangement," Blair paid no attention to the interruption, "then I thought it a necessary one—now, I see it has been unfair. I believed your success should justify my stagnation. The more I tried to efface myself, the more you let me. Finally, you took it as a matter of course, a duty—a privilege. Because of the children, it was up to me to endure the years when their claim on me was paramount. Nor am I regretting nor resenting those years, it is all part of motherhood. Only, Tony, you did not realize what was happening."

"I think I did—I think I appreciated how splendid you were, how well you carried on—what an incentive you were for me—I wish you wouldn't talk as if I had been a wooden-manikin stalking in and out at meal time and ignoring everything and everybody but my wishes and myself."

"I don't mean to talk that way," Blair corrected,

"I mean to say that things simmered into an unfair routine in which you took the credit and I did the carrying on. Your home training—believe me, I speak without bitterness—was the training which causes this confusion and hubbub of women's rights and extreme, often futile efforts to obtain more than a fair share of them. You considered yourself lord of creation—very good. But I am lady of creation, not milord's handmaiden! As long as we were engrossed in boy and girl romance, it never became an issue. We were unconscious of the deeper, disturbing factors which were doomed to come to light."

"Blair—please," he protested with angry unrest.

"Wait. I took up the darning basket and then the cradle, those tools were my duty as well as my wish but they were new tools—did you ever help me with them? No. You were occupied in using the same impersonal tools I, too, had been taught to use. And therein, it was unfair. I don't mean you should have stayed home to help do womanish things, furnish cartoonists with material. A woman must care for her home, her family. A man must take care of them financially. But _____,"

"But what—what?" he said with grudging im-

patience. He was striking matches only to blow them out with meaningless extravagance.

"You should have taken a certain responsibility upon yourself. You were fond of stating I had been your classmate—but did you really understand that, because of being your classmate, I might long for some definite interest along the lines of my training? Did you realize that my mental continuity was being shattered by being thrust into housework and child bearing and that my nerves would have to pay the price? It was your duty to have helped me keep this continuity rather than camouflage its destruction by pseudo-romance."

"How could I? How can any man? Blair, you've done some marvellous thinking since I left you!" Tony stood up, pacing up and down the room, pausing before he turned a corner to look at his handsome, indignant image in the pier glass.

"By an attitude of mind, you could have made me feel more satisfied and logical than all your trinkets and tenderness. You should have realized that home is, truly, the center of one's affections but not the limitations of one's interests, your wife having the right to this same truth. You should have realized the tragedies thick about us these days—untrained, middle aged women with grown

families who turn, oftentimes, to excessive religion or invalidism as a means of self expression. A man's finest work is done from fifty years on—the world seldom appoints a younger man to positions of trust or honor. But what of women? I mean the married women who start all too late to express their impersonal abilities. Oh, it becomes a joke and a sob all in one!"

"A woman cannot have—" he began thickly.

"Negation is what we want to stop, we want affirmation. The world needs the work of such women. Talk of needing man power—think of the woman power we lose, think of her valuable contributions to social problems. Who would be better fitted to do social and community work than the experienced, idealistic but no longer personally needed woman of middle age?"

"Blair, Blair," he protested—angry at his lack of argument.

"Personality gets you across, true enough," she insisted, "and I admit your personality is a powerful one because you have never allowed anyone to restrict it. My personality could be powerful, too, but you have taken for granted it was to be a burnt offering to my husband! So I have had to be drastic," she ended wistfully, "I have had to, Tony—

don't you see that when one is fifty, it is too late to start in with impersonal interests? Just as it is too early for a man to retire, to dismiss his world affairs? Instead, he is apt to redouble his efforts and reap his greatest success."

"I must say you have worked out an elaborate indictment of masculine infamy," Tony wondered whether ridicule might not be the wisest weapon.

"Accuse me on any grounds you like—intellectual rebel, father complex, over activity of the thyroid gland, plain fool—I refuse to surrender my future, if we are to have a future together. Oh, sometime, young, educated women—emphasis on the young, say I—must train their families to this new vision. Then the job will be well underway. If homes are going to endure, they must be co-operative places in which all share and contribute and no one person is the sentimentalized prisoner who is released only when the march of progress has swept by her forever. No, I am not bitter," as she read his unvoiced question.

"You don't love me," he added quickly.

"I do. I love my children—but I must be kind to myself."

"Just what is the mind state we head hunters have neglected to have—I don't quite get it," Tony de-

terminated to carry things off in a flippant manner. In a few moments, he would propose coffee and a chafing dish supper and he would tell the funny stories he heard at the week-end party Polly and Bill gave in his honor. He would dazzle Blair with his description of ruins, his tour of the Scottish lakes, his mild debauch in Paris.

But she was answering quietly and with a certain dangerous determination: "To marry without realizing your wife's right to keep in touch with impersonal interests. Like yourself, she has the privilege to an anchorage in the outside world, to form her own estimates no matter how affluently you support her. Above all, you must understand—even desire—the time will come when she will develop her impersonal interests, after she fulfills her personal obligations. Is that so unfair? You can help her keep this viewpoint, help her have faith in herself. Oh, everything is relative—pain—love—careers. But every woman from Mother Eve to Beatrice Judd has or can have an individual viewpoint or talent for which the world would be the better and every husband from Father Adam to Anthony Judd junior has a conflict with himself before he will admit this and try to foster that talent. I'm sorry all this had to come up as soon as you

came back—but I couldn't have begun my own salvation unless you had gone away—so there," Blair's voice husky with emotion, trailed into an unsatisfactory ending.

Tony stopped pacing about and went back to his easy chair. He did not answer.

She began a methodical round of locking up doors and drawing shades, concluding tasks of a housekeeper's day. When she returned, Tony had gone into his bedroom and was unpacking furiously.

Blair followed. She felt it might be wisest to ignore the conversation.

"How about prices?" she asked by way of a polite interlude, "was there much difference—all told?"

After a brisk discussion of prices, tipping, lack of central heating, Tony asked with amusing gravity whether she intended keeping the position very long.

"Why—want to offer me one in your own office?"

"No. I wondered how much extra money you needed, enough to finish paying for your car?"

Blair shook her head. "Poor Tony," she murmured, "it is not your fault you misunderstand."

"Fault—what fault?" In his ire, Tony upset the box of collar buttons.

Mercifully, Blair joined him in the floor hunt. Their heads came together unexpectedly as they pursued a last escaped stud. They found themselves kissing the other's bumped forehead.

"Oh, Blair, it is so good to see you," Tony confessed.

"Truly?" her eyes were the Chinese young-blue.

"And I could not feel any other way if I returned to find you elected hangman," he admitted boyishly. "I blame Roxy for a lot of this," he kissed her again.

Blair drew away. "Wrong. It is not Roxy. And I'm to have thirty dollars a week beginning in January."

"Blow the thirty dollars—I'm ready to take a chance at making good with capital letters. Let's get a new house and a real car—you'll be too busy to go to an office. I salaam before your brain—so! I'll salaam morning and evening, if you like. How is that for a compromise?"

"I'm too busy to think of a new house. I can't unlearn the gear shifts of this car all in a moment, either. I don't want you to salaam but share. I was patient and stood by when you asked me. Pay back. I have a fair system worked out about the children and house and I am not equal to any up-

heaval. I'm taking on new work at the office and that is enough. By and by, you'll realize I'm right, yes, you will—and we can come to an understanding. Ah, there is the collar button—see—under the chair——”

“People will call me a spineless nonentity.”

“A few men may because they'll be afraid their wives might follow my example. Real people won't. Besides, it is our own affair.”

“Are you going to dress like Roxy?” he asked in mock alarm, “Blair, have a heart. Must I put a padlock on my collar and necktie drawer? Besides, if you expect me to do the ironing along with everything else, I'd never get through my work, honest, I couldn't,” he put his hands on his hips and talked in a high, nasal tone. “It's all so sudden! Say, dearie, can I count on every Thursday night to go downtown and see the trains pass through?”

Blair abandoned serious argument—but not ideas.

CHAPTER XXI

"I HATE star witnesses, drilled beforehand by the prosecution," Blair told Tony when he tardily reopened the subject of her new position. "You reformers who want to point out the evil of your ways, always cite extreme cases which somehow dovetail too perfectly with bombastic theories. I wish you would stop calling my attention to wrecked homes, malnourished children. There is as much domestic havoc wrought by eloping butterflies of mothers and unkind, unfit nursemaids as by we so-called feminists. But, cheer up, Tony, everyone else in the family is on your side—you can have a charming time receiving sympathy."

Blair was unflinching. No matter how Tony protested, ridiculed, sulked, Blair held her position and kept up her domestic schedule with stoic endurance. It was too much for her, which she knew, but she refused to relinquish a fraction of dearly won independence lest it result in annihilation.

She had failed to make headway with her

original intention of entering the business field to prove to Tony she could do so, make him turn to her as a future partner, a stay-at-home partner for the greater share. The job she now held had allied her with the brainy minority, pushed her steadily into the foreground of a career. In no sense was she a half time worker, a substitute but an executive being who was learning to become immune to the personalities of commercial "muslin souls" as she was unimpressed by the bluff of "broadcloth breasts." Blair realized, due to an incident at the beginning of January, there were times when she wished this to be otherwise.

She had been asked to lunch by a commercial artist. The advertising manager deciding to join them, the trio selected a table window at a hotel dining room which soon revealed Tony lunching with a prospective customer and his wife. With conglomerate emotions, Blair recalled he had mentioned the lunch that morning—it was to consummate a big deal, he hoped. But neither Blair nor Tony had estimated the reactions upon seeing the other as a business rival, in a sense, separated from personal or social ties. Blair, in her tailored outfit, seated between the men, was busily talking of two and three color processes, looking over sample

sketches, ordering extra coffee and determined not to glance at Tony's table after the first casual view. Tony, well groomed and most attentive to the customer's wife, had just recaptured her fallen handkerchief, looking over at Blair and then back at this expensively dressed woman, who accidentally invaded her husband's lunch hour and was politely included in the invitation. She wore a corsage, Blair carried a brief case. She was keen to be off to a *matinée*—Blair had told him she had an appointment at two with a prospective copy reader. Then the commercial artists recognized Tony and bowed.

"I heard your husband was after the Fellows contract," he said to Blair, "looks as if he had it in the hollow of his hand. I wonder who he'll get for the art work—jove, I'd like a look-in."

"Mr. Judd could do the thing awfully well," Blair insisted, "I haven't heard him name any artist—you might ask you yourself, if you like."

"Good looking wife of Fellows," offered the general manager. "Good looking coat, too."

"Isn't it," murmured the artist who was engaged but too poor to be married, "well, that's the way for a man to dress his wife but how many of us can?"

The conversation threatened to become uncom-

fortable. "Better make a sketch of Mrs. Fellows—you could use her type. I'm afraid these things aren't what we want—oh, yes, that one, I'll take—we have to impress the Sears-Roebuck strata and that combines the practical and——"

But she was conscious of Tony's rising to help the "good looking wife on with the good looking coat"—he was deferential and debonair to the extent of making his guest feel she was, for the time being, the most important person in the world as far as he was concerned. Tony was wishing it was Blair he was helping into the moleskin and sending to the matinée. And Blair found herself longing for the luxurious wrap rather than this mottled tweed and a blouse which showed it was a third wearing. She was cheaply jealous, she told herself, and hurt and amazed when Tony merely smiled over and followed his guests out of the room. Purposely, she called for a return of the pastry tray—she wanted Tony and his party to be well on their way before she arose.

When Tony came home that night, Blair had remained in her business dress from a ridiculous sense of not playing up to her husband.

"Did you get the Fellows contract?" she asked without delay.

"I did," kissing the children and then his wife's left ear lobe. "Did you fire that fool of a Masters? I wouldn't use a drawing of his on a bet."

"I bought a quaint sketch—and we have other plans," she said mysteriously. "I think he has splendid ideas."

"You mean eyes." Tony was longing to express his disapproval at her lunching nonchalantly with two men, two strangers. When his guests asked who she was, he had been obliged to say, "My wife."

"Did you enjoy your lunch?" he asked finally.

"Very much—did you?" Blair would not yield a point.

"No and you know why. You looked awfully shabby, Blair—I can't help telling you. It seemed so wrong to have you sitting there . . . when Mrs. Fellows knew you were my wife, she was polite and all that but she thought something had happened between us. Hang it, everyone thinks that."

"Hang it, they do," echoed Blair, "and if they keep on, they'll make something happen. Is there no one in the world capable of believing that——"

"I don't know just what it is but there is no one capable of believing it, I assure you," said Tony

grimly. "I could have gone over to that table and snatched you up in my arms and carried you, kicking, scratching—biting if you like—to a cab. I can't share you, Blair—don't ask me to do it."

"And if you won't share yourself," she retorted, "what then?"

"I share all I can—besides, you can't keep up this gait—it's a losing game the way you have started in—you'll give out through sheer loss of vitality. You're emotional, as you should be—and things will get to a pass some day where you'll run away from them—back to me."

"Never."

"Blair! Have I ever tried to deny you anything within reason—can I, without warning, be asked to upset tradition, conventions——"

"I'm patient with you, Tony," she interrupted, "because you don't understand—therefore, I cannot blame you wholly. But we'll keep on—you and I—until you understand or I smash. I'll never give up."

"If what you mean is that I'm to ask you to be partner in my business, that will never happen," he told her shortly, "I could never do it. I don't see the reason for your expecting it——"

"All right—then let's keep on as we are. I'd

rather lose your love and gain your hard headed respect, as much as it would hurt me. I did not realize what this would mean when I took that position. If I had realized, I doubt if I would have ventured forth—I'll concede that much. But since I've ventured—I'll not turn back."

All winter, Blair worried over the children's training which she could not remedy unless she turned back unreservedly into the Bungahigh. She suffered from the conflict which this situation brought about as pitted against her success in work and advancement into the position of the advertising manager. Her advancement meant that some of the copy could be given to Tony's agency if she chose. He appreciated the work but resented Blair's having brought it to pass. He was decent enough not to proclaim this fact and to listen, more or less, to her suggestions. Once before, she had advised and he had been amused or unimpressed. Then, she spoke from behind a baby's crib. Now it was from behind her desk. Following Blair's suggestions, the advertising Tony did was successful.

Later, Blair offered him the chance to write a stray booklet about women in finance, to be distributed at the first convention of women bankers

in the middle west. Tony spurned the offer, it would net but little and he was eager for big contracts. So Blair wrote the brochure and spent the profit by giving her family a luxurious Christmas dinner, served by a maid. She also bought Tony a knife to replace one recently lost. He insisted on presenting her with pennies in return.

"The old superstition—must give you something to insure future amicability—can't have our love cut in two," he said lightly, dropping the money into her lap.

"Wish I could be sure pennies are a positive proof," Blair said soberly.

"You don't think we will ever change?" he bent down in quick alarm.

Blair laughed at her own nonsense. "I'm tired," she excused, "I would weep if anyone played Home Sweet Home on a banjo! Of course we will be amiable—always—always."

He took advantage of this betrayal of nerves to urge a vacation but Blair refused. Business was most engrossing, Sonny had started kindergarten, Beatrice was through her first primer. Blair refused to desert her post at such an interesting juncture.

Tony had learned not to argue just as he had

grown to crave what he termed "big stuff—top profits." He visited the Sterlings sometimes, usually without Blair, he liked their Sybarite method of entertaining. Muriel's artificial self amused him. He did not care whether or not the Sterlings were sincere or honest. Their lavish hospitality produced the same exhilaration a society comedy does for a shop girl.

Blair remained antagonistic to Muriel's scheme of things; moreover, she did not care to meet Peter Cabana who had come to be part of Muriel's drawing room appointments. Muriel referred to him as her pet turtle and boasted she had cured him of snapping.

Muriel posed as being sorry for Tony, she intimated this frequently and asked if nothing would convince Blair she was acting unwisely. Tony resented any criticism of Blair, he was not in love with Muriel or even deceived by her but he was not at all unwilling to be asked in as "an extra, handsome dear" as Muriel usually worded her invitations. Tony was tired of his own somewhat hurried household. By contrast, Muriel's white and gold drawing room and her Dresden doll self proved irresistible.

He fell into the way of lunching with his chil-

dren and aunt, the latter rejoicing at his so doing. The children, secure with their great aunt as buffer, found eating with their father a hilarious novelty. Occasionally, Tony lunched with Blair but their noonday hours seldom were the same.

Both Blair and Tony avoided each other publicly, neither one admitting this was so. Perhaps this semi-mystery as to the other's engagements led to an amusing yet revealing happening at a public ad club luncheon at which both Mr. Anthony Judd and Mrs. Blair Norcross Judd were on the programme for five minute speeches. Tony's came first.

An appreciative round of applause greeted him as he rose, self confident and well appearing, to address the crowded room. Sitting at a side table, having come in late, Blair felt a thrill of pride, possessive pride, as well as curiosity when Tony began to speak.

After his first two sentences, she leaned back in her chair with a sense of whimsical dismay. What was left for her to say when her name was called? Tony had used not only her ideas but her manner of stating them. She had unconsciously rehearsed her speech the previous evening, Tony listening without comment. True, he had no idea she was to speak at this affair—no programmes were printed.

After her first dismay, Blair was conscious of victory. He had considered her judgment sound, her opinions pertinent. Before these men and women comprising his rivals and associates, he used his wife's words.

Absent-mindedly, she joined in the concluding applause—and pushed aside her plate of luncheon. She was indifferent to the rest of the programme until the chairman of the day asked her to come to the speaker's table. Then Blair's eyes sought Tony's, he had not known that she was to be among the guests, much less a speaker. When she was introduced as "Mrs. Blair Norcross Judd, advertising manager of the Champion Knitting Mills, who has something interesting to tell us today——"

Blair rose, a trifle trembling, her hands cold and her cheeks flushed as she said briefly, graciously, that her guests had already heard her opinions ably expressed by her husband, Anthony Judd.

The applause, which conveyed in some cases surprise at finding that Blair and Tony were husband and wife and in the remainder, a relief at eliminating another speaker, allowed Blair to slip away unnoticed. She waited downstairs until the guests had filed out. Then Tony found her.

"I didn't know you were going to use that stuff,"

he began contritely, "I wouldn't have said a single word of it—fact is, I hadn't time to get to thinking about anything—I'm overworked this time of the month——"

"Be fair," she smiled up at him. "Don't undermine what was a tribute to your wife. If you thought enough of what she said to quote it publicly, why, in private, try to say you used it only as a careless makeshift?"

"I think what you said was sound and sincere," he admitted, "I'm only regretting you didn't stand up and say it first."

Blair's eyes were wistful. "Isn't it just the same—didn't we say it publicly?"

"You did," Tony insisted; he felt chagrined, unfair. "Going right back to the office?"

"No, I'm to get stockings for Bea. I'm going home early—I've promised the children a treat."

"I'll try to be with you," he said eagerly, "I'm glad you are going home early."

Tony did join them by four o'clock—with toys for the children and a ravishing box of cut flowers for Blair.

"Indemnity?" she asked as she arranged them.

"Never—tribute," he answered lightly, engrossed in putting together his son's mechanical toy.

"Either way—it seems to me extravagance," was her only comment.

In time, Tony expressed scornful contempt for Leon Caspar, who was more poetical and childish than ever, dogging Blair's footsteps and playing the drone at work. Younger members of the office force drew cartoons of him and left them on his desk, suggested that he was the logical candidate for president of the Erie Canal and asked why he tried to institute a leisure class within the confines of the knitting mills?

Blair and Roxy were together more than Tony liked—or could prevent. Roxy was proud of Blair's progress. She would have had her adopt drastic measures, break up the Bungahigh and go to live with Miss Judd. But Blair was amused at this suggestion.

"I would not give up my home for anyone or anything," she said in a final refusal, "for what else am I working? Hardly for money because my being in business adds to the house expenses. I am working to keep my family's respect later on, make them, in turn, self sufficient, self respecting. Take those children into Aunt Agnes's cottage—never!"

"You would not have to be there very much," suggested Roxy in self-revealing selfishness.

Blair had a tremendous attack of conscience following this conversation. She must take care not to be an extremist, she warned herself, she must not neglect her family. If only Tony would do his part—let Blair share his affairs while he assumed a portion of the home responsibility, what satisfactory arrangements could be made. However, Blair's income proved not only welcome but essential as time went on. Tony's profits did not increase due to his desire for only large contracts which precluded smaller opportunities. Occasionally, Tony took a flyer in stocks—to his disaster. No one could have stated the exact day that Blair began paying for the children's clothes and school, her own wardrobe and expenditures and rounding out the house budget in the matter of help, refurnishing kitchen ware and table linen—repair work—turning in the sedan and, by paying more money, obtaining a new one. Her position at the mills, while responsible and interesting, did not require all of her time. The advertising work, and she now did nothing else, was of a fairly routine nature. So she did extra pieces of work—an ad for a new face cream, some doggerel setting forth the slenderizing merits of a brassiere, she became the muchly ridiculed press agent for Turkish baths,

declining the unlimited baths for payment and pocketing the monthly stipend with satisfaction.

When she came to an actual clash with Tony regarding work to be done for a municipal charity drive, Tony asked her to yield in his favor and fancied that she would—she had dissembled so prettily at the ad club luncheon.

"I don't see why I should," she told him briskly, "I need extra money, too. You have not increased the sum you give for the house—you have withdrawn my allowance and you never seem to realize what the children are costing. You say you must enlarge your business, add another solicitor, another room to your office suite. Very well, I'm willing—anything you like if it gets you to the top of the ladder. But, meantime, extra expenses come on me and I won't refuse any work I can do better than you can. I know the women on this drive committee and I am positive they are not prepared to pay more than my bid. You are trying to force money that they cannot afford to pay. Be reasonable."

"You mean you have underbid me?"

"I mean I'll do what they need to have done for a hundred dollars, it is a splendid cause and I am interested. Besides, I'm friendly with the evening

papers who are the ones to do the featuring. They tell me you asked two hundred and fifty—I call it profiteering.”

“I thank you. How do you know how I’d handle it? I’d win them more money than you will—I’d have posters and—oh, well, I’m not going to scrap with a bunch of women—I had a personal interest in the thing, too. But two hundred and fifty is the least I’ll touch it for—and when you try to do business with women you know socially, Blair—particularly when it involves their pet charity—you want to look them full in the face and ask a top price. Believe me, you’ll earn it. You’re a scab,” he teased, “you have a job and then try outside work at cut prices. You’ll get us all down on you if you do this way. The firm ought to pay you enough to satisfy you.”

“They pay me all the job is worth—I’ve a grand sounding title but their advertising is routine stuff. That is why they don’t mind about my doing outside things. In fact this very job was offered me by the president’s wife—she is one of Mrs. Bishop’s *alumnæ*, too. There you are.”

“Then do it—I’m off. What does a thing like that amount to when you get the Fellows’ contract and really life sized commissions?” Tony boasted.

"No one wants you to get the life sized commissions more than I do," she told him, "but if you won't co-operate, you've got to expect competition. I'll take their work for a hundred."

Which she did—and after several nerve-racking sessions with impracticable women and a delay in receiving payment (but not criticism), she was asked if she would not turn back ten dollars of her check towards the cause. Blair admitted Tony had been right. They would not have treated Tony in this manner—his two hundred and fifty dollar price would have proven his protection. Blair gave the ten dollars and wilfully spent the remaining ninety in buying a sheathlike gown of peach colored taffeta. Upon seeing it, Tony asked her when she intended to run for congress!

To satisfy her conscience after this extravagance, Blair took two days and a half away from the office, beginning on Thursday. She cleaned and mended and baked and had violent altercations with her children who retorted that their aunt allowed them to do so and so, she said their daddy used to.

Tony came home for dinner on these nights in a genial frame of mind. He told the children stories and built roaring fires in the open hearth before

which Blair sat and mended while he read aloud. They even tried to remember some of their piano duets but gave it up in good-natured discord.

"Seems like old times," he said, the third evening.

"It doesn't to me," Blair contradicted, "then, I was so tired I pretended to know what you read out loud. Now, I'm really able to think about it. I'm due for a five minute talk on Russia at our business women's next open forum."

Tony did not press the subject but became suddenly sleepy.

"Cabana has suggested we buy a real house," he said before they set out for a Sunday afternoon drive, "I don't know but what it would be a good thing. What do you say?" He omitted to add that Cabana had sympathized over Tony's home situation and Blair's increasing success, suggested that a large house might "keep the little woman so interested that she would not play truant."

"I don't agree at all, we are fairly comfortable—and just making expenses. When we move into a permanent home, Peter Cabana will not be the one to sell it. I want to be on the edge of town with a garden and——"

"Your typewriter desk?" Tony pretended to ask the question carelessly.

"Perhaps. At any rate, by that time, I'll not be in the Champion Knitting Mills," Blair rewarded him. "I'll have accomplished what I set out to do. I wish you'd disabuse your mind of the idea that I like a time clock arrangement, I don't——"

Tony ignored the subject.

"Is it cold enough for my big coat?" she asked.

"Think so. Going to wear your new dress? The blue one? That's nice. I don't like you in your fighting togs."

Blair glanced in her clothes press where her tailored suit and blouses hung. "Fighting togs?" her eyebrows arching, "do you call Muriel's frocks her vamping togs? I've a notion to wear a collar and tie Roxy gave me last week."

"Please," he was rather helpless, "dress up all pretty and wave your hair."

The children joined in the request. So Blair obeyed, even to pinning a corsage of satin flowers on her coat and draping a dotted veil about her hat.

"Well, family dear?" she demanded, backing the car into the street, "how does mother look?"

"Nice," said her son promptly.

"Silly," was her daughter's frank decision.

"My lovely," Tony hastened to add.

"A nice, silly lovely," thought Blair as she turned

in time to avoid Mr. Cabana's limousine and his pompous bow. "Then I can't have neglected them overly much or they'd betray the fact if only with adjectives."

CHAPTER XXII

IN April, Blair was elected delegate to a woman's convention in Atlantic City. She sent no proxy. Instead, her family went to Aunt Agnes's and Blair, with new, good looking blue things, a timely speech in mind and deliberate happiness in her heart, attended the affair. She received her share of attention and press items but returned to find the children had succumbed to measles while Tony had been ordered to wear glasses all the time.

Blair took a humorous view of the dilemma. "My family is not going to ruin as the tract writers would have it. The children would have had measles if I had been at home and I have warned Tony not to read in bed until all hours. I hope this will be sufficient lesson to him."

Culpable because of previous warnings as to unsanitary neighbors, Aunt Agnes was not vehement in her reproaches as she might otherwise have been. It was evident that the children had contracted the measles in the downtown neighborhood. Faithful

and sentimental custodian of them both, Aunt Agnes made profuse explanations to Blair; she had dreaded her return. When Blair took the news with sensible unconcern, she felt relieved—yet disapproving.

The quarantine being necessary, Blair contented herself with visiting via the window panes through which barrier she read stories and had lengthy and consoling conversations, after which she went to her office or back to the Bungahigh where Tony was side-tracked due to eyestrain.

Tony and Blair enjoyed their fortnight alone. True, much of the conversation concerned their children, who took on deific qualities by virtue of their absence, but it was a rest to be by themselves, with uninterrupted schedules, removed from juvenile tyranny. As soon as the quarantine was lifted, Blair hurried them home, stayed away from her office two weeks, paying a substitute to do the routine work and being consulted over the telephone at frequent and always inconvenient intervals. The children now belied their parents' fond tributes. They seemed possessed of fiendish talents, their fertile imaginations having had time to flourish while on short bonds.

Tony's new glasses promised to accomplish wonders, as well as his rest at the Bungahigh. But

Blair felt the Atlantic City convention must have happened a lifetime or so ago. She was amazed and disappointed to find herself so easily tired and discouraged. Her head throbbed when she tried to think of business, housekeeping, invalid cookery and summer clothes simultaneously! When free to return to the office, the children returning to their school, it was an effort to appear mentally alert. Her substitute had left things in confusion. She was a nice little dimpled soul, engaged to be married, as Blair had once been, working only to buy her trousseau. Even Annette Blake told Blair it was a relief to have her back and the first day, the president sent her home in his car, Tony having borrowed Blair's.

These attentions passed over Blair's head lightly, she was bent on finding an extra advertising job which would net her a hundred dollars. This would pay the doctor and drug bills and help Tony with his oculist's fee. Blair had wanted to assist at a spring tea of her Garret Club but her once attractive blue frock was shabby from reckless wearing and she had no ambition to go forth and inspect Easter millinery. Other details demanded her attention. She must put in a requisition for a new typewriter. She must persuade Leon Caspar to go

away and learn to stand on his own two feet. There must be an extensive replenishing of bed linen at the Bungahigh, she had had no idea things would wear out so easily, it proved what these hand laundries did to the best of materials.

During the time with Tony, Blair had rediscovered a significant fact—he was still a lovable, talented child. One gained more through petting than prodding him. Wisely, she had betrayed maternal concern over his astigmatism, ransacked her cookbook to make daily offerings in the way of favorite dishes, Tony gaining two pounds as a result. He seemed indifferent to the shabby state of their house furnishings, the doctor's bills, the children's expenses. He had accepted Blair's estimates. He did find fault with his children's behaviour and hint that Blair ought not plan on keeping up such a hard routine, she would break nervously, if she did.

Tony's chief anxiety was about his business which had started to decline through the lack of big commissions. He complained that he needed more capital—his retrenchments always proved boomerangs. You had to spend money to make money and he refused to have his offices cluttered with "small fry." Tony and Blair had many a sober discussion, Tony in dressing gown and slip-

pers and Blair in her house dress and a blazing log fire before them. A passerby would have said, "An ideal couple—how devoted he is—how domestic she is—just the way things ought to be."

But had they lingered to overhear technical discussions as to the way to sell an idea, tri-colored cover pages, merits of various lithographers, the eavesdropper would have been convinced that circumstantial evidence was an unreliable affair.

Blair disagreed with Tony as to his stand about business. She considered he now suffered from stage fright and for a man who had had several important contracts, he had not made the most of his ability. For instance, he should have spoken about his trip abroad before several organizations, both social and commercial. He should have used the old world backgrounds and phrases when he exploited refrigerators or nursing bottles or snowshoes just as he used American slang and modernism to rejuvenate the line of British canned goods. Instead, she felt that Tony, despite his extravagant private office, was dwindling into the routine of the average advertising copy writer. Why should this be? He fairly bristled with original ideas, not only in college but with Carson and Scott—now was the time to recall them. Blair considered he had

inefficient help. When he showed impatience because she would not sympathize over the limited purchasing value of his capital, Blair said that she would either work for a reputable firm such as Carson and Scott and trade on their vastness of capital or else she would plunge and take a chance. If she owned an agency, she would hire first class men or none, furnish her office more simply than Tony had done but see that the clients called upon her instead of dashing out to see them, as he seemed to do. Well, she would manage it! She could not say just how—not offhand. She would give small lunches at the best grills, make them distinctive affairs which would be noised about. Yet with all this, never would she feel any job was too small for her best efforts. Say—the things Tony tossed aside and she managed to catch! Oh, he need not frown—these “crumbs” had bought many things for the Judd family besides supplying oil and gas for the sedan without pause. While she was doing smaller things, she would be on the watch for larger ones—that is, were she in business. Even the work for the charity drive, during which she was heckled and patronized by every member of the committee, had been the means of her being elected delegate to Atlantic City.

Whenever conversation became too personal, Tony managed to change the subject. He was discouraged and financially in arrears but he did not wish Blair to suspect. She had been too successful a truant from her home and Tony was still determined to prove what he could do. But a snail's pace maddened and baffled him. He told himself, his conscience being well trained, that this eye trouble had pulled him down, he would feel like a two-year-old in a few weeks, he might take another chance on the stock market—one could never tell. Sterling got away with it. The day before the children came home, he asked Blair if she was going to sign any contract to remain with the mills.

"I won't sign a contract," she answered, "nor would I resign. They are putting out the fall and holiday line now and they would have a hard time to fill my place. Apart from my own inclinations, my weekly envelope has been well spent right here. Do you realize, that with extra work, I average about fifty dollars a week? Just before I had to take this time off, the Persons' Brothers, who have loads of money to spend and who are putting out a new fancy wafer, asked me to do quatrains for them, they want to run ads in the better class of magazine. I knew they would think more of me if

I asked sufficient to buy the Judd family's winter coal supply—so I quoted my price and they did not seem astonished. I'm to know positively within a week whether I'm to have the order."

Tony refrained from asking why Blair did not send them to his agency when she knew he needed the work. He gave a quick exclamation which might have indicated admiration or aggravation. It caused Blair to add:

"I did not send them to you because I have sent three different people who wanted small copy turned out and you shooed them away as if they were peddling chestnuts. I lost the money, too. You lost my confidence. When a real chance came, I kept it right in the family lest you decided you could not be concerned writing poems about fancy wafers."

She was dusting the living room as she talked, her face turned away so he could not gauge just how much was humor and how much long-standing indignation.

"Sorry," he volunteered. "I know you are keen enough to handle any contract that comes your way—so all power to you. How's that for broad-mindedness?"

"Splendid," she cried, emptying his ash tray, "it

is a broad highway after all. We've not collided to date, have we?"

"No—but we've missed each other. How about that? Home has been so different."

Blair swept the hearth with a tall witch-like broom. "If I gave up my job," she said finally, "I should lose my family later on. The only way to keep my family—I trust I am not too far sighted—is to keep this job until——"

"Until what, lovely?" this time Tony's coaxing tone maddened her.

"Until my husband and children have realized what a great job it has been to have kept a family," was her paradoxical ultimatum.

Tony took her answer as a sign of selfish ambition and spent the evening wondering what Blair would do if he were some man that he knew of, what would she do if he suddenly fell out of love with her and in love with some nice pink-and-white person or if her children grew up and went to the devil because their mother was in business or if he became blind—any number of pleasantly tragic and remote possibilities.

Blair punctured this egocentric phantasy by calling him to see the nursery made ready for the children's return. She had made gay bed and dress-

ing table covers and upon each respective chair was a mysterious bundle containing the welcome home surprise.

"Can't you see how they'll laugh?" she asked, ignoring his gloom. "I almost believe Bea will be a tyrant unless we take care. Thank goodness, she has nice eyes. If one must be a tyrant, it is well to have a more or less ingénue landscape."

Tony praised the room. Looking down at her, he said half ashamedly: "You've worked so hard—but you always do that, never sparing yourself! Do you never want to play?"

"It is enough to work hard as I do," she told him, "I like the being tired both in brain and body. Before, it was just my body, my brain kept rebelling and suggesting all sorts of things. With people like Roxy, their brains are tired but not their bodies—and there's apt to be a different sort of confusion. As for just play—I wonder!"

CHAPTER XXIII

DURING the summer and early fall, Blair and Aunt Agnes found themselves at an intellectual deadlock. Aunt Agnes had the more appealing grip, her arguments were the sentimental, traditional variety against which Blair's unsentimental, modern platform appeared worse than futile—unfeeling.

As a result of her over-education (Aunt Agnes stoutly refused to call it higher education) Blair was dissatisfied with normal home life, although her children were adorable and her husband a peer among husbands. She wanted Tony's job and her own too, Aunt Agnes complained. She left her children to their tender hearted great-aunt and then was displeased at the way this great-aunt cared for them. She hinted they were spoiled as well as dyspeptic little pragmatists. She interfered when Beatrice wore an amazing number of handmade petticoats and wanted the child a tom-boy in serge bloomers and middy blouses. She insisted her hair

be bobbed instead of curled and her son must be his father's polarity. Well, if she was certain this was the proper way for her children to be trained, why not stay at home and do the thing to her own liking? It was a hopeless situation, according to Aunt Agnes. If Blair kept her office job, she was unwomanly; if she stayed at home to make her children into cold blooded modernists, better she put on her hat and go to an office.

Aunt Agnes whimpered of this state of affairs to Tony who, floundering in business and pessimistic generally, hinted that he agreed but, for heaven's sake, say nothing of this to Blair. It would look as if he were a disloyal gossip.

However, Blair surmised Tony and his aunt had joined forces. She fought out the question with herself—was it right to prove her theory and save her self-respect but step out of her home in order to do so? It was not, she would decide, seven times out of ten. The remaining three times, she would recover from puritanical self-abasement, mental colic and declare it was right—she must be reasonable. From eight forty-five, to be exact, until three o'clock, Beatrice was at an excellent country day school, the same school Blair would have selected had she remained at home. (Only she would not

have been able to afford it, very likely.) Her son stayed at the school until luncheon time. From three thirty and one thirty (times of arriving by the school bus at Miss Judd's) her children were with their great-aunt until Blair called for them before six o'clock. On Saturday mornings, sometimes for all day if Blair had extra things on hand, they were at Aunt Agnes's. Every Sunday, Blair devoted herself to her family. Now—had she remained home, how much time would the children have been with their great-aunt? They would have spent at least one afternoon of the school week and Aunt Agnes would have come out to see them at least two, since her other interests were singularly few and limited. Subtracting this time from the original sum, how many hours of wrong training and "motherly neglect" did her children fall heir to? And what was all this hue and cry about? Still, it was not Aunt Agnes who was at fault any more than it was Blair. It was Tony. It was his oblivion to Blair's being anything else but his wife and to his own responsibilities in being a father as well as an individual citizen. No one, after all, could remedy this dilemma except Tony. Then she would ask:

"True—but if Tony is at fault, is it not due to his aunt's training? Is she influencing my children

as she influenced him?" Common sense would answer: "But she is not influencing them overly much. You are their confidant and chief adviser. You hear their prayers, you supervise their education, you are still mother, center of the home. Only, they have come to realize their mother can think as well as cook. They enjoy and take for granted coming to your office as much as rolling out cookies in your kitchen. Well you know, if an emergency should arise, you would not hesitate to let work go by the board in order to devote yourself to your family. You have already done so. But you must never let work go by so far that you could not catch up to it."

In midsummer, the Judds and Aunt Agnes took a vacation in the north woods, renting a cottage for a month to enjoy and endure, by turn, the freedom of the open and lack of gas and electricity. Tony had to go to town during the month. Blair wrote her advertising quatrains (a second series) and sent them off by special delivery. She experienced much satisfaction having done this. The smoking oil cook stove, the mammoth mosquitoes, poison ivy growing round their door appealed to her sense of humor instead of ruining her enjoyment. After all, these details were not paramount in her scheme

of things. Work was paramount and after she gave her first efforts to it, she could afford, by contrast, to smile at what would have been a calamity if she had not done so. Blair realized that at one time, she would have been tense and combative over the inconvenience of this camp housekeeping. Her restless brain would have been forced to have made as much as it could out of the harassing situation. Now, she relaxed as she cooked bacon and eggs, sent the children to a farmer for milk, admired the pink borders around the cloud clusters.

In the fall, Muriel Sterling called on Blair to display her cape of beige dyed ermine which she had bought as a result of one of Oliver's clever deals. Muriel had spent the summer in the Berkshires, charming people there if only one had letters of introduction! She had stayed at one of those expensive inns on the edge of an exclusive resort. Here, with considerable progress, she spent her time making social connections beyond even those of Oliver's family. Everyone had been "so sweet and so impressed with Oliver's knowledge of finance." Indeed, Ollie felt New York was the next logical step. Muriel rather dreaded this since it meant a stupendous income if one was to do things properly. A Park Avenue apartment would

be at least four thousand and one must have a smart summer place to flit to as soon as the calendar veered towards June. Still if it meant her husband's advancement, she was prepared to sacrifice! More and more, Oliver was interested only in the really vast ventures and men trusted him, older men, too.

How did Blair stand working in an office and coming home to this funny little house to do the housework, more or less? Of course, it was not much of a house and she could see they had not bought many new things to be taken care of—still, there were just so many steps to be taken and so many persons fed. Tony was such a handsome lamb, if Blair would listen to sisterly advice, she would play around with Tony instead of wearing dowdy clothes and fondling a typewriter. Of course, Blair was brainy and clever—but the nicest husband in the world, particularly if he was fairly young and handsome, was apt to fall for a fluffy playmate. She did not want to suggest any such possibility—only she would prefer to see Tony forge ahead and Blair ritz it a trifle. The four of them could have such good times if this was the case. Better think it over, she concluded, as she insisted Blair ought to come to tea some day and tell her she was

ready to succumb. She would send her car for her, if Blair would let her know the day before.

There was a patronizing challenge as she suggested this last. It caused Blair to promise carelessly that indeed, she would be happy to come sometime, she refused to let this insincere manikin think taking tea with Mrs. Oliver Sterling was anything but a brief punishment in the day's events.

Muriel floated out, beige dyed ermine and all, waving a white kid gloved hand at Blair who unceremoniously lingered in the doorway. Someway, she was glad the children were out with their aunt and Tony staying downtown for a stag banquet. She did not analyze her reasons—that she was afraid Tony might have agreed with Muriel. But she did wave her hair and put on her peach colored taffeta, waiting up until after eleven for Tony's return. He did not seem to notice either her waved hair or best frock. He was tired, discouraged at losing a contract he had felt was as good as closed and bored with the banquet.

Blair wondered what tactics Muriel would have advised to have won his admiration and attention.

As the holidays approached, she admitted to being nervous, always conscious of Tony's prophecy about her vitality playing out and her inability,

purely on physical grounds, to keep up the pace. This prophecy maddened her. She became stoically dishonest about danger symptoms. She was perfectly all right, she did not need more than five or six hours' sleep and black coffee was not at all harmful—how ridiculous to suggest such a thing.

"Funny little incidents or speeches stick in my brain like slivers—and fester," she complained to her father in despair. "If I were talking auto jargon, I'd best say it by the fact that my spark plugs seemed to be clogged! For instance, I keep remembering the cheap tie pin some salesman wore and I think of what Muriel said or how Roxy did not smile as frankly as she used to or I keep seeing my son after he had fallen into the lake last summer—all this in the middle of a business conference! Then I'm afraid I betray the fact—and I stutter. I can't close mental doors. Why should this be?"

She was sorry she had admitted as much. "Look ahead, Blair," her father told her gravely, "where do you think you are heading for?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, startled.

"I think Tony is like most men," he told her in his convincing way. "He won't believe what he does not want to—what generations of men before him have not been asked to believe. And if you

have done all this to prove you are as smart as he is—you'd better stop short before there is any serious damage done. I'm no judge of modern life—according to the younger generation, I'm mentally pensioned. Things have changed too radically to apply our theories or tactics. Of what use was the harness and whip when horses were shelved for automobiles? Oh, we older ones may kid ourselves we're abreast of the times just because we wear wrist watches and read psycho-analysis but we're not. And I think that's a proof that something's wrong with us, too. I'll grant you that much. We haven't our finger on the pulse of you youngsters. You've run away from us. From the looks of things now, I can't imagine your children running away from you. That's one point in your favor. You sold me the idea of a college education but you haven't sold me the idea that a woman can have an office as well as a nursery—maybe I'm too dull to grasp it. I wish you'd keep in mind that, according to all the other women who have tried this thing, you are riding for a fall—and you had better be prepared for Tony's refusal to catch you!"

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR a ninth anniversary present, Blair's father gave her a check for five hundred dollars. Blair promptly engaged a competent day maid. She would provide so that her children did not go to their aunt's after school hours. Blair's mind would be more at ease.

Her father still disapproved yet applauded his daughter's platform. He was bound to admire her, she was paying dividends in a sense on her educational outlay, just as he could not help an almost mechanical reaction that she was not doing what her mother had done. Of late, he had become concerned about Tony. He admitted this to Blair during a downtown luncheon. Perhaps Tony was not as big a man as he once promised, otherwise, his agency would have gone ahead. Perhaps he needed a partner, a balance wheel—Tony was rather dynamic. He, personally, had done all he could for him but Tony never followed up his leads. He was

acting constrained, aloof, these days, as if he feared loss of dignity.

"Which is a mistake any way you want to figure," her father concluded, "he'll get his dignity back in his coffin—now's the time to get his bank-roll. Tony's got to be a good fellow and mixer if he is going to hold his ground. He acts as if he felt so sorry for himself."

"I think Tony was premature in starting for himself," Blair recalled at what personal cost this had come to pass. "He should have stayed with his firm a few more years. I suspect he suffers from inferiority, feels he has slight backing, is being criticized. His way of showing this is to affect indifference. He fancies that is dignity."

"I don't know but what you have said it," her father began scrutinizing his daughter carefully. "But you look too old, Blair—Tony doesn't. Anyone ever dare to tell you this? Better have a—what do you call them—a cold cream facial and wear soft, fluffy stuff near your face."

"You brute," Blair bantered, but she did not look into a nearby mirror because she knew her father's remarks would be substantiated. "Why try for a kiss-baby effect? I'm not a flapper. It is almost Bea's turn."

"No, but a woman can look her best until she is eighty if she will only use her brains."

"You mean if her husband has money and gives it to her." Blair was thinking of Muriel. "I don't want my appearance to be my career."

"You don't get me. I think a woman has a sort of—now don't laugh, my wise child, a sort of mental or spiritual beauty and vitality during the middle years. It—er—shines through," he waved his stubby fingers expressively. "But you seem strung on wires, always on the defensive for an argument or idea—but not a smile. You work too hard trying to be in two places at once. Stay home a year, see how it goes, get a bigger house and take Aunt Agnes under your wing. If you can't change Tony's idea about your ability—I'd stay home and make him prove his own ability. Then I'd take all the profits and look very coy and happy."

"You sound like a Ouida heroine," Blair said sharply.

Here, Leon Caspar spied them and came to make himself a nuisance. Blair kept thinking of her father's challenge as Leon mooned about his love and the coldness of the world as contrasted against the warmth of his last poem. Sometimes, Blair despised Leon, other times, she felt maternally

tolerant, anxious lest he become a permanent adolescent. Today, he inspired indignation. As they entered the office, her father having left her at the restaurant door, he warned her that she was being watched—was she amazed—why not believe him for once?

“Watched! What a silly you are. Join the communists and get a commission in the bomb brigade. You are spoiling for an opportunity to make a complete idiot of yourself,” Blair insisted, “and if you keep on writing me notes, I shall turn them over to Mr. Kimball—this is the last warning.”

“Oh, Mrs. Judd,” pleaded Leon in his falsetto not unpleasant voice, “you will come to see that my way is right—this Roxy, you think she is your friend? Bah! She is the snake in the grass—she hates you,” he lit a cigarette to punctuate his remarks.

“Are you growing queer?” asked Blair harshly.

“She hates you as much as she once loved you,” he confided, coming so close Blair longed to box his ears. “Strange, is it not? Have you no idea why this could be so?”

“Just now I have but one idea, that you deserve a psycho-pathic ward. Come to your senses, if you

have any. Work instead of dream, find some nice girl and try to support her. Make a bonfire of your dramas and poems and renovate your brain with a little hard work. Why do you insist in *pestering* me?" In despair, Blair resorted to the homely word.

"I will tell you why," Leon added, petting his wisp of a mustache with a moist hand, "she hates you because she has fallen in love with me!"

Blair was angry but all she said was, "Please clear out, Leon—I'm busy—and dangerous."

"She may wear men's collars, be brave and ferocious when she talks, have a bank account but she is just a silly woman, an educated old maid! She longs for romance. I warn you, she will tell your husband of my admiration for you. She watches us—she hates you because I, oh, Blair, can I help my—"

Blair had rung for her slim but sinewy assistant who, of his own accord had christened Leon "the weak-fish."

"Leon can't find the way to his own desk," she said briefly, "suppose you lend a hand."

Crimson with mortification, Leon escaped the assistant's outstretched hand. Blair laid a finger on her lips as the door closed.

"Sorry you lost such a good chance," trying to

pass the matter over lightly. "You see, he read me one too many poem."

After this, Leon avoided her with noticeable manœuvres. He left a long apology on her desk, also a few sonnets, repeating his gossip and the bland statement that Roxy had succumbed to his charms. He begged Blair to "be on her guard" but Blair made no response. She tried to forget the incident although it cropped up at unreasonable and frequent intervals. She did not tell Tony, perhaps because it sounded far fetched and conceited to claim Leon was infatuated with her, ridiculous little cad that he might be. Tony was in no tellable state of mind these days, he worried about his health and was given to gymnasium drill and diets.

Blair was forced to admit that Roxy had not seemed as friendly of late, they had not lunched together in several weeks. Still, that could be easily accounted for—she would not be as foolish and imaginative as Leon Caspar.

Periodically, Leon repeated his warnings. Once, he confronted her as she left the office and begged for some word of sympathy. He assured Blair that he despised this Roxy woman and loved—forgive him—loved only Blair. Be kind to him for he was of a dangerous disposition and for

months had struggled with his emotions. Surely she would be an angel of goodness and, at least, show some tolerance?

Blair turned him aside with a short answer. She decided to tell Tony without delay knowing the unpleasant argument which would result. Tony would insist she ask for Leon's discharge or leave the office herself. She was unwilling to do either. Tony was but human, he had had spasms of amusing jealousy during their courtship and just now—but she found herself wondering if she could provoke even half a spasm.

She took the next afternoon to drink the long promised cup of tea with Muriel and be impressed by the Sterlings' grandeur of background. Cabana dropped in informally. He was now promoted from the rank of pet turtle to that of Muriel's fairy godfather! He had his divorce and no delicacy in telling its details. He said he owed Muriel everything for her hospitality and comprehending heart, few knew what he had endured—ah, but he was a man's man and would take the blame in silence.

He drove Blair home, radiant with Muriel's praises (and brandy) and rather contemptuous of the Judd finances. He did not mention their buying a house. Nor was he greatly concerned with

his former tenants and mortgagees. Cabana was bent on having Indian summer. As he told Blair, he felt but a boy at heart—with a grand-dad's experience and income! He was going to express the poetry in his soul. In other words, he had learned to dance and found a sufficiently expensive tailor. Tony had said he planned to visit southern resorts that winter with the rest of the bar flies.

The tea party added to Blair's distraction. Reaching the Bungahigh, she felt impelled to telephone Roxy to ask her to dinner, she must dispell any absurd suspicions. But Roxy could not come, Blair fancied a coldness in her voice. She tried to be solicitous about Roxy's last case, which had been unsuccessful, but Roxy was in a monosyllabic humor. In despair, Blair hung up the receiver and wondered if she was the idiot and Leon the sage!

Tony arrived with the makings of an excellent cold and a list of grievances against a client who had double crossed him in using ideas which Tony had not safeguarded in advance. Dinner came on the table somewhat scorched and Beatrice upset her mug of milk. Her brother wept sympathetically when she was scolded which caused his own reprimand on the part of a nervous and sneezing father. Blair finished the evening of minor catastrophes by

remembering it was Aunt Agnes's birthday—an event hitherto celebrated by a family dinner as well as gifts. How could she explain such callous neglect? Her only comfort during her thought-out apology was that it was Tony's aunt yet he, too, had forgotten. He left such details as birthdays and holidays for Blair's memory. It was such minor details which formed the bulk of evidence proving that Tony, like most of his brethren, drew an unfair, uneven line of demarcation between a man's work and a woman's duty.

CHAPTER XXV

AUNT AGNES pretended she forgave the neglect of her birthday and Blair pretended she believed herself forgiven. Both women blamed Tony but did not mention the fact. Blair now took another step in rearranging her household. She left the Bungalow and moved into a downtown apartment.

This was the preliminary to Aunt Agnes's selling her long cherished house, now suffocated between a machine shop and a foreign grocery store. The sale was fostered by an enterprising concern of shoemakers, who realized what a point of vantage the faded, Queen Anne cottage could become. They paid a fair price for the property and lost no time in building on rooms for innumerable boarders, cutting a front shop window and allowing the one-time garden to become a parking space so wealthy working men might feel assured their six cylinders were unmolested.

Aunt Agnes was grateful when Blair and Tony undertook the task of moving her from the cottage.

She could not bear to see it dismantled; most of the contents sold or given away. When she murmured about finding a suitable boarding house, Blair insisted she come with them to the downtown apartment. Tony heartily seconded the idea. He was content with this new arrangement which meant an end of furnace work and snow shovelling, expensive day help for the lawn and garden which resulted in a row of pigmy plants always tramped down by the children. The children would still attend the country day school until full five o'clock and Blair's additional money (she netted three thousand with extra work) would provide an out-of-door vacation in the summer. Soon she would send the children to mountain camps or they might build a log cabin in the hills.

Aunt Agnes need not feel she was a burden. Day help was more feasible in the apartment than at the Bungahigh. The neighborhood of the latter suggested nothing more than a "little girl after school hours" or char-women. Besides, they would save gasolene because they would walk to their offices, both needing the exercise. The apartment they leased was far removed from the Gramatan atmosphere of honeymoon days. Although, it, too, as Blair insisted, was but a temporary dwelling. When

business was on a more stable basis with Tony, they might try a house in the suburbs again. For now, this seven room, spacious flat with two baths and janitor service, to say nothing of a front balcony which afforded "atmosphere" for Sonny's goldfish, was the best place they could have located. It was a hundred and thirty-five dollars a month. This was economical compared to the fuel bills and extra expenses involved at the house on the hill. They would have to spend some money in furnishing the apartment, which Blair christened as Headquarters, but they would have had to refurnish the Bungahigh, for that matter.

Aunt Agnes surrendered to their plans, the children were enthusiastic. There was a park a few squares distant and the school bus passed the apartment house door. The Bungahigh became the home of a bridal couple who considered it too darling for words. They were so happy and unsuspecting that Blair presented them with her curtain rods, a hundred feet of garden hose and three cans of French blue paint which had been intended to create a futurist effect when applied to the outside shutters.

Headquarters was furnished in reed furniture and soft, inexpensive rugs of domestic make. Blair surveyed the result with something akin to satisfaction.

It had a homelike air, with just the suggestion that no one was ever home overly much. She did not feel her net curtains and cretonne overdrapes were a whit less attractive than Muriel's imported fineries and she considered the second hand dining room set quite fetching, even if the buffet doors were inclined to stick and two of the chairs were to be looked at, not sat upon. Aunt Agnes had contributed her old fashioned walnut book cases which Blair and Tony promptly filled. The place had a somewhat polyglot not undesirable effect. Everyone's individuality was expressed. Each of the children had a room, even if Beatrice's opened onto a fire escape and son's boudoir had formerly been used as a store closet.

"This is more like it," praised Tony, after they had moved and things were in running order. "I feel ten years younger not having to come up that blasted hill to find a smouldering furnace fire, snow a foot deep and no help of any kind. You, too, Blair, had to turn in after your day's work to get some sort of a meal. The machine used to stall four days out of five, if you'll be honest. When you get down to facts, it was nonsense to stay in that cheap hut of Cabana's. Headquarters has more room and conveniences, quite as much fresh air and a

great deal less work. We can walk to a theater or park inside of fifteen minutes. Until we strike the real yellow jacket, I vote to stay here and be independent and happy."

Blair agreed. The apartment afforded her more leeway in all directions. She could reach places without a long, cold ride. Friends came to see her whereas they seldom came as far as the Bungahigh without special invitations. Moreover, she often called for them and took them home. Here, housework was simple. There were no stairs but a willing janitor and wife. A capable woman came by the day to do their other work. Tony's aunt was removed from her unsuitable environment. When her father was in town, he could stay at a family hotel next door. The children, who adored their grandfather, always clamored for him to be close by.

So Judd and Norcross outweighed the advantages of this new home against the disadvantages of being more or less under public inspection, hearing frequent and unwelcome noises of other tenants, being on the top floor and the elevator, a chronic sufferer of paralysis, going altogether too often, due to convenient location, to motion pictures and delicatessen shops.

It was impossible to carry out their vacation idea this initial summer. Next year, they would rent a cabin for three months and come and go as it was necessary. They did not mind this first summer in town, it proved to be a rainish, coolish affair. The children went to the park a great deal and Aunt Agnes and Blair planned and executed many day excursions to the lake.

Blair was becoming known as a reliable advertising woman. Her firm appreciated her, although in no position to pay more. They compromised by offering her some stock which was certain to rise and permitting her to do outside work. Carson and Scott, Tony's former firm, sent her a letter asking if she contemplated making any change. It would have seemed disloyal to Tony to have responded to this. Blair heard unpleasant hints of Tony's waning business. She felt she had the right to be opinionated in her judgments, frank in voicing her ideas. When she tried to help Tony, he was displeased, he denied he was worried over business or that it was anything but on the up. But he was growing out of touch with the things upon which Blair's finger had found its way to the pulse. He became quick tempered and complained of facial neuralgia. After consulting another oculist, he

threatened to abandon medicine—it was an empirical science, none of them knew what they were doing. He spent much of his time at his club and began to play a rather sharp game of billiards. This was unproductive of business, Blair judged, but she knew better than to have suggested it. Tony was too sardonic and uncertain of disposition. He criticized his children upon slight provocation and, secretly, took a mail order course in how to acquire a magnetic personality.

Moreover, Tony had taken up the dangerous hobby of “I want” instead of “I will do.” Perhaps he was innocently due for an epidemic of this insidious American experience, product of too much mechanical ease, too lavish resources. By degrees, eight generations of American born Judds had decreased in their personal efforts, spiritual struggles until this descendant was the logical exponent of self-indulgent assurance. It is significant there is no authorized goddess of the machine to take her place beside the patron saint of vital trades—fisherman, farmer, poet, soldier.

Like many contemporaries, all unknowingly, Tony earned his living and ordered his life in alignment with the prevailing forces—the machine—the atmosphere of ready made, no need to wait, plenty

of them, why not fortunes as well as foundry supplies? Therefore, the god of glamour, a dangerous pretender was claiming him for a follower. Tony wanted easy money—the first part of glamour's ritual. An American of Americans among foreign scum, he felt he was entitled to it. Tony was nationally out of form, as an athlete who fancies his past record permits him to forego training.

The source of this trouble had been Blair's efforts at what Tony termed independence. Secretly, he believed himself misunderstood, he was unwilling to see her viewpoint. Now, compromise was not to be considered—they had chosen separate ways. Only Blair, through child bearing and housework, had become immune to glamour. She had learned that one not only worked for what one got but had to continue in effort if they were going to continue to succeed.

Outwardly, Blair and Roxy remained friends but Leon's deluded self had succeeded in creating an invisible breach which both felt duty bound to conceal. Roxy was irritable and visionary these days, unreliable in her interests and efforts. She had gained not only public prestige but annoying *avoir-dupois*. She still lived in the thumb nail apartment, where Blair had spent the memorable vacation, but she adopted a distinctly feminine style of dress, even

to earrings and bracelets and a fur wrap which put to shame her former homespuns. She carried a vanity case and had a permanent hair wave. People murmured they were never certain how they might find her. Her ability seemed as rhythmic as her temper. She went to risqué matinées by herself, read frothy fiction, became engrossed with psychoanalysis, by which tender science she found self-excuse and gratification for her increasing strangeness.

Both women refrained from discussing Leon Caspar, it was mutually voted a dud topic. Blair now believed Leon's insinuations might be true. She had come across Roxy eating lunch with him—and paying for it, too. At first, she insisted it must be a matter of big sister sympathy on Roxy's part, the same altruism she displayed towards wayward girls or elderly people. Underdogs had always been Roxy's *pièce de résistance*, the more they were under, the more ardent her attentions.

Leon's attitude towards Blair remained unchanged. She knew he was responsible for the occasional floral or poetical offerings she found on her desk and he still insisted on heaping her supply cabinet with bountiful sundries. She told herself Leon enjoyed this hurt dignity and unrequited love; she refused to take the matter seriously. But

Leon waited, as he informed her in free verse, for her discovery that he was essential to her happiness. Then she would beg forgiveness for this bad behaviour.

Blair's increasing dissatisfaction in being in the office was due, somewhat, to this situation. But a change could not be affected while Tony's business ran along just clearing expenses and the house relying, more or less, on Blair's earnings. At first, the situation had been entirely the reverse. Neither Blair nor Tony had intended nor believed it could have changed.

CHAPTER XXVI

"SOMETHING alarming has happened," said Blair, as she walked home with Tony one December night. They had attended their alumni banquet. "We are no longer friends. We are merely married."

Tony did not help her across the street, although she had paused. Instead, he lagged behind to light a cigar and then answered:

"Don't theorize, I'm dog tired. That room was abominably close, wasn't it? And hasn't Bob McNurney turned gray? He is only our age, too, isn't he? I must say I think he married a girl who was much too good for him—did you notice how he acted towards her all evening? Not the second glance! I don't like class reunions, after the first two or three years. Life is so darned inevitable. We all go the same deadly route of biliousness and discontent. We become too fat or too thin, deaf or divorced or something damning and expensive, yet we come grunting and whining around the banquet table to pretend we are still brimming with that

first, fine enthusiasm. We roar out the old songs and pant the yells and make lying fools of ourselves in speeches. Even the waiters smile at us. What's the good of holding on to anything too long? Let youth and youthful memories fade out. It only stirs up regrets—and such affairs as this set us back four bones each and a night's sleep. I must say Bob's wife was the only beauty there—she was not a college woman, either.”

“She is pretty but very silly,” Blair was unable to refrain from adding, “you used to call her Muriel's understudy. Only her father left her a fortune so she did it rather sooner than Muriel. She was painted like a model and no woman with any sense would wear full evening dress when she knew we would all be informally dressed. I thought Bob was ashamed of her—”

“A fat chance he'd have for sympathy if he tried to tell me so. I call her a peach . . . you're getting a little gray yourself, Blair, ever notice it?”

“Um. It began when we lived out at the White Elephant,” Blair's eyes were dark and rather dangerous looking.

“By the way, I'm going to the Sterlings' Thursday—Ollie is having a smoker and I ought to drop in for the looks of the thing. I have a good time, I

admit—sometimes, I think we are prigs. We go around rendering an anvil chorus about everyone else, but do we ever stop to wonder what the people say about us? They must say something—at any rate about you,” a suggestion of overemphasis was on the last word.

“Let them say things, it is good publicity to keep them talking,” Blair retorted, shaking the snow from her furs. They entered the apartment house to find an incapacitated elevator. “Well, here is where we ascend the Eiffel tower for the fourth time inside of a week.”

Panting upstairs, Tony burst out, “I’ll wager they say, ‘Poor Judd, he thought he was rather smart, once upon a time—must have been an awful jolt when he came to. Just now, he looks as if he needed a better tailor. But his wife has outdistanced him, all right—advertising manager for a knitting mills—club woman, all that—has trained her family like a troupe of acrobats, they jump through the hoop when she gives the signal—used to be a pretty girl—great, blue eyes—sunshiny hair—her father and husband thought her domestic but she was not to forego the spotlight—so—she—woof, I’m dashed if we don’t apply for the first ground floor flat available—” Tony had reached the top landing.

Too tired to answer, Blair let him unlock the door. A few moments later, Tony wilfully selected a deadly looking cigar and a detective story, despite the late hour. Blair determined to answer him.

"That was cheap of you," she began steadily, "I don't like to hear you say cheap things. I mean about class reunions—and then me. You have never recovered from my earning almost as much money as you do," her temper gained over steadiness. "You've never been big enough to see my viewpoint—although your own is quite small. It may take another generation before men can do that. But I shall train my children to realize each have rights as well as duties and unless they exercise them somewhat equally, usually the woman, as the old melodrama teaches, will be the loser. You are lots nicer than most men, Tonibus, but you have chosen a stupid, stale rôle to play. I've never told you this before and if it makes you care less, I refuse to be sorry."

"Please stop," he said curtly, opening his book, "you and theories—and frumpiness! You forgot to include that. All very well for you with a salary and my income and my aunt here at home and my—my good nature," he added hastily, "to talk as you do. But think of me with the responsibility of a

business and no one at home to buck me up. I'm going to sell the first chance I get and take a position—at least, I'll know where I'm at."

"Let me help you," she asked, "together—"

"Impossible. I'd do better asking Aunt Agnes for snappy suggestions."

"It is not impossible—it is logical if you would but see it. Share home responsibilities and let me share business. If we unite in affection why not in duty? You are so narrow, so provincial, Tony—so behind times."

"Of course—most assuredly—the universe is wrong with the exception of Mrs. Blair Norcross Judd," Tony began his story.

Blair smiled in spite of herself. "Poor Tony," she said with maddening pity, "you'll have to see the truth of things sometime, discard your masculine inhibitions—"

"See what?" darting up in spite of himself, "I can see that you are the most cold-blooded, self-willed woman I ever knew. You do what you want to do—"

"Who has it harmed? Who has it cost anything?" she asked with practical brutality. "Are we not living more affluently than if we depended on you and you alone? Am I more tired or nerv-

ous or frumpy than when I stayed home 'to buck you up' and you would not discuss business with me because I could not be expected to understand—I was not in touch with the outside world? Are the children undisciplined weaklings? You know they are not. Even your aunt admits I have not been away more than the social butterfly or professional invalid. My own mother, I remember, was ill in a rest home for months at a time. She died when I was twelve. If anyone pays for my stand for expression, cosmic continuity, I am the one. And I am willing to pay—please understand me. I am willing to turn gray, wrinkled, withered, die at fifty from nerve exhaustion if I have succeeded in starting the wedge that my children will widen. I'll have proved a wife need not be a nonentity, after she has been educated to be otherwise. If husbands won't do their part in this big problem, of course the wives will be failures. You, who complain of being disinterested in early associations, discontented with your wife, unsuccessful—it is because you won't play a straight game. You will distort your case until you produce a crisis. Well, I'll not flinch. If only you would be honest in admitting my right to justify an education, you'd find yourself discarding the delusion about women being domestic

doves or vultures. In its place would come wholesome, enduring camaraderie. Once and for all, you can neither bully nor coax. If you try, it will not be a question of my being here more but of my not being here less. Everyone has a definite, proper place. I have found mine and am oriented. Why cheat me out of it under the guise of being a good husband?"

He told himself it was small use putting his cards on the table, Blair only used them to play back against him. So he did not answer.

In a moment, Blair went away while Tony puffed vigorously at his cigar and continued the crime story, hoping devoutly there would be a murder in the first chapter.

In January, before their wedding anniversary, he came home gray of cheek, pathetically tired. Blair had sent for him. Her father had been taken ill on the road and they wired her to come. Together, they took the journey west which ended in reaching Kansas City an hour after Mr. Norcross died. In the pained excitement of the moment, their temporary rift was forgotten.

For days afterwards, Tony could not bring himself to tell Blair that on the date her father had been taken with heart seizure, he had offered his busi-

ness for sale, dismissed his small force and applied, with success, for a position with Carson and Scott. He had been taken back at a much less salary than he would have had had he stayed with them, they did not mention a bonus or common stock for a Christmas present. They did mention his wife's ability and the fact they had written asking if she cared to come over and talk terms.

In February, Tony took up his new position. In February, he succeeded in selling his business, the small price enabling him to pay off bills and get new clothes. The sense of lifted responsibility was immeasurable. He was free to indulge in that deadly pastime of reconsidering the past, trying to estimate where he had made his worst mistakes, when he should have achieved success. He emerged from the experience feeling he had not had a fair trial, he had been hampered, discouraged. As things now stood, he made a fair living without risking every cent in the world. His keen, dissatisfied mind began casting about for some side line which might supplant his income in a modest way. He laughed at himself for this spurt of ambition but decided to underwrite insurance in a modest way. He realized that he must plan for the proverbial rainy day. Apartment house life was easy but it left him with a

zero bank account. A house and garden was a tangible possession, it would give a sense of security. Perhaps, before too long, he might buy such a possession for he had qualms as to the future of his recent agency, although its new owner seemed optimistic and capable.

Tony had hesitated before selling to his ambitious purchaser, yet he accepted her terms feeling that he would be acknowledged as right, if she should fail in her handling of the business.

For his purchaser was Blair Norcross Judd who used her father's small legacy to release Tony from his financial obligations.

Tony carried off the deal in high handed manner. "Certain you are not going to regret this?" he asked as Blair named the time and place for the signing of legal papers. "Funny sort of thing, isn't it? Selling the business to my wife, taking back my old position—wonder how it'll end?"

Blair was intent on figures. She glanced up at Tony's half reverie, half question. "No telling," she answered easily, "I may fail and have to take to making tea biscuit. I may succeed and have a ready made business for my children."

"You'll discover that an independent venture is vastly different from being on a pay roll," Tony

told her. "In some ways, I'm not sorry you are going to have the experience. Some people need drastic proof."

"Don't they though?" laying aside her pencil, "you poor, bewildered husband."

Tony smiled. "That's the first comprehensive word you've spoken in ages."

Neither Blair nor Tony realized that the significance of this transaction could best be expressed by saying as affairs stood now, it was Norcross and Judd!

CHAPTER XXVII

A YEAR and a half later, Tony flattered himself he had solved the problem of self-preservation by a false interpretation. His aunt's death, coming in the fall, suggested this solution.

At this time, the Judds were still at Headquarters. The children were engrossed in school, Beatrice a long-legged, blue-eyed barbarian and his son an amiable, freckled person absorbed in baseball and cutting Sunday School.

In the matter of religion, Blair and Tony had, long ago, smashed the traditions of all churches and been content playing around with the fragments. But what of their children, they had been forced to ask? Unless given the cultural background, which longstanding creeds offered, their future seemed without foundations! So they sent them to as tolerant an organization as was within walking distance and took pains to attend service at least once a month, upholding parental dignity.

Blair's independent agency had experienced neither

spectacular success nor humiliating failure. It was not what Blair had hoped it would be; it was more than Tony had anticipated. Tony was ashamed of his secret wish for Blair's downfall. Briefly, Tony still suffered from old ideas for young wives. And Blair had departed from these ideas without justification. He felt she displayed lack of confidence in her husband when she became a wage earner and this could never have come to pass excepting she did NOT love him as he thought she had or as he loved her. Since love is all-powerful and prevailing, etc., etc., Tony comforted himself by reasoning that his great love had not been returned in full. Being a gentleman and a father, he did not suggest this to anyone, least of all to Blair. But he dwelt fondly on Blair's initial housekeeping days when Tony was her only interest. He fancied he could trace her gradual revolution to the final mutiny. He was given to cynicism as he lingered and dilated on this mare's nest. Blair did not love him! He conjured up instances to prove the assertion. Almost forgotten college flirtations, about which Blair laughed, became serious evidence. Either she had loved someone else and he never knew it or else she was incapable of true, lasting affection. Tony had a remarkably fine time pitying himself. This con-

clusion appealed to him and afforded more solace than the truth of the matter—that Blair loved him as she never could love anyone else, but she refused to turn doormat to prove the fact.

He was content being a salaried man. The lifted responsibility far outweighed any whispers that “Judd wasn’t the big man we thought him.” He always comforted himself with “but Blair is not the girl I thought her—well, all life is a gamble.”

He had grown a foreign looking mustache and become an authority on screen plays. He was fatherly towards the younger men; when they announced their engagements, his smile was of pity as well as congratulation. He made radical plans for his son’s education and his daughter’s lack of the same. His daughter should not go to college unless she proved, beyond any doubt, that she possessed a master mind. More and more, he believed such education for women was undesirable, he hoped someone would write a smashing article bearing him out.

“I’ll write it,” Blair offered one time, when he expounded his opinion, “I am bitterly opposed to such education for women unless husbands have an equal share of another variety.”

Tony discouraged any arguments with Blair.

Both flattered themselves their home atmosphere was polite, even if strained. Their children never saw nor heard anything but the well-bred, logical machinery of family life. Of their own accord, they abandoned Aunt Agnes as an authority. Blair was more touched than amused at the relentless shelving process. When she mentioned it to Tony, he pooh-poohed the idea and said the children loved their aunt as much as they ever did; all youngsters passed through a "smarty" stage, soon enough, their mother would be the next victim. Why was she always conjuring up some unpleasant situation?

Blair admitted one lack at Headquarters, due to her being in business. Tony was polite when she did so, his heart warming over the confession. The children lacked proper social life. True, they were invited to parties, but were unable to repay the courtesies. Blair stayed at home to give Beatrice a birthday afternoon, she spent as much disposition as money arranging the table and favors, providing a game programme with prizes. Beatrice wore a new frock and her brother was wretched but artistic in a pongee blouse and velvet trousers. Nearly all the children came, but they were shy and constrained. They had never been to see Beatrice Judd and they did not know her mother. Their mothers

shoved them in the door with a brief, "so good of you to ask my child" or sent them with a maid, calling for them in like fashion. They did not know Beatrice Judd's mother either.

Blair had to wrack her brains to find an assistant for the party, Roxy was out of the question, her other friends were, more or less, engaged in regular routines. In despair, and because Beatrice demanded it, she asked Muriel Sterling, who was hailed as nothing short of a fairy queen because of her silver tissue gown and wonderful rings. She was counted far lovelier than "Beatrice Judd's mother who wore a dyed silk dress and queer shoes."

Beatrice complained about this situation. "You don't know the mothers," she accused in her direct fashion, "you never come to dancing class or morning assemblies. When Sonny was in the Cave Twins play, not even Aunt Agnes came. I don't like you to be so unthinking of us, mother."

It was Blair's turn to be hurt. With severity, she asked herself where she had failed with her children? Her one boast was that she had not neglected the family because she paid attention to her own brain. Their diet, clothing, education, recreation and so on were open to the most careful

inspection. She had bribed the janitor that her son might be proud owner of a small terrier and she was almost jocular on the subject of how many articles he destroyed weekly. Beatrice had love birds and a row of potted plants which she coaxed into blossom, Blair could enumerate numberless activities and ideas which she fostered as well as originated. Yet she did not know the other mothers! She was conscious of lacking that gracious, easy fashion of playing hostess. She was becoming angular—no doubt of it—her belts were constantly being taken in. She no longer demurred over wearing a felt sailor to the office because it was weather proof and required no adjustment. Long ago, she abandoned weekly hair treatments. She wondered if her family would call her a “nice, silly lovely” as they once did when living at the Bungalow. She manicured her nails in snatches and wore flat shoes. But why should externals determine destiny? Why should a child’s naïve criticism cause a sleepless, inquisitional night?

She did not tell Tony that she was perplexed. She had learned he would seize upon any opportunity to drive home the fact of his dissatisfaction. Blair never doubted Tony’s love, only she was not concerned with love these days. Business taxed her

energies. She made as much money as Tony, not counting his underwriting insurance. Together—yet separately—they lived well but carelessly. Blair had been unable to save, she had so many places for her money and the children's expenses she met almost without exception. Tony did not attempt to save. Unable to heretofore, he felt no urge to deny himself any luxuries he wished. Since discovering that Blair did not love him as she should, he felt entitled to all manner of compensations.

When, from mistaken but kindly motives, Blair engaged Leon Caspar as an advertising solicitor, Tony was possessed of a violent resentment. He had been jealous of Leon as well as disliking him personally. Blair labored to explain that Leon had been ill due to weak lungs, he had been sent to a state sanitarium for nine months. He had, no doubt, forgotten his erratic ideas. He had no immediate family or resources and he promised Blair he would write no more poems, in addition to foregoing cigarettes. He was just a sick young thing, she said, surely, she could do no less than give him a chance.

"I thought he was so devoted to you," Tony objected, "has he changed in that, too? Perhaps I was wrong—but it was my impression from some-

thing Roxy said. "You never told me," again he reminded himself that Blair did not love him.

Blair's face crimsoned. So Roxy actually insinuated things! The absurdity of the situation caused a spirited defense of Leon.

"Can't you see I am doing what an older sister would do? Gracious, Tony, I am almost thirty-five and Leon is twenty-seven. I'm showing him how he can walk on his own feet—if he does as I say. I've talked to him as if I were a judge and letting him out on probation. Roxy makes me cross—how comes it she has time to invent such nonsense? She'll be believing in fairies if she isn't careful."

"Do you like him?" Tony ignored her reply.

"Not much, but I'm sorry for him. I believe him harmless and capable of doing fair work. He is one of those persons not sufficiently talented to warrant his being excused from the daily grind. That is what has fretted his soul. I'm the only person offering him work. If you can dig up a better job, please do it and I'll send him around tomorrow morning. I'm not expecting he will do me credit, I count it as one variety of charity."

"If Leon was a girl," Tony persisted, "would you be so keen——"

Blair's indignant eyes caused him to change the subject and ask if she had saved yesterday's morning paper. The subject was not resumed.

This had been in the early summer—when Aunt Agnes began failing. After which Roxy remained away from Blair. Roxy wore even more temperamental costumes, alarming her friends with her sudden frivolity and neglect of work.

"Roxy's trying to be twenty-one—and under the mistletoe," was one caustic summary of the situation.

Blair had endeavored to waylay Roxy and discover in just what direction she was heading, but Roxy was unresponsive, making it clear she did not care for confidences. Offended and disapproving, Blair turned her energies back to business and the family.

Polly and Bill Farnsworth had arrived in town for an extended stay with relatives. It was their first visit to America since their marriage and Blair, who promptly went to call, found an entirely different Polly from the one for whom she had been matron of honor.

Very sure of herself and pleased with her appearance, Polly, in a cobwebby lace dress, regarded Blair with more pity than interest. Poor, provincial

Blair—what worlds apart she was from Polly's sophisticated sphere.

"So you're in business, old girl," she began with an assiduously cultivated accent, "how jolly! Everyone's trying it on the other side—this very frock came from the shop of the Honorable Nancy Cherriton, you've heard of her, of course? Always done smashing things—hunted big game in Africa, a royal scandal, two marvellous husbands. She's considered the last syllable as a modiste—but tell me about yourself."

"There is not much to tell," Blair answered lamely, "Tony is back with Carson and Scott and I have his old offices, not as gorgeous as he had them, but doing fairly well. The children are dears and Tony's aunt is far from well. We live in an apartment which you will soon enough see, for I want you to come for dinner on Friday. We're still planning for a real home—something like yours must be. Tony was entranced with it."

"Why don't you get it?" asked Polly with the privileged curiosity of an old friend. "It would help in business. The Honorable Nancy Cherriton trades heavily on living part of the year at a Tudor country seat, mortgaged to the moat between ourselves, but little that matters."

"I won't get anything I cannot afford," Blair informed her, "besides, the servant problem is no small matter on this side and houses have never had the reputation for running themselves—we moved into the apartment because it was convenient all around."

"Oh, then you went into business for the money in it and not the lark? That is a different story," Polly was thoughtful, a trifle disappointed. "The women I know in London go into business for the fun of it—a new sort of toy—understand? Lady Aloise Huckstep has the duckiest book shop, she never advertises because she only wants a certain class of purchasers. It is on the top loft of a sixteenth century house and she serves tea every afternoon. Sometimes our dramatic club has rehearsals there in the evening. Lady Huckstep carries a remarkable stock of naughty things you can't buy elsewhere. It's always a crush when she gets us on the wire and says she has a new flock of novels. The smartest women in town crowd down and squabble over them. Lady Huckstep is a naughty novel herself, she is the snaky sort that can carry off bare-foot sandals and rainbow smocks. She gives readings in French, it is considered a feat to get a card. I have been twice."

“Has she any family?”

“Four of them—down in Torquay. Her husband is a perfectly good thing but dull. He can’t keep pace with her. He was gassed besides, so he prefers the country. But he’s very convenient—she can trot him out whenever convention demands. I don’t believe she would try to get away with all she does unless she had a husband to refer to occasionally. Then there is Violet Boltwood, I’ve never seen a more fascinating little tobacco shop than Vi’s (she asked me to call her by her given name)—she sells Russian cigarettes and cunning jewelled pipes and she dresses in the smartest smoking suits, trim, satin trousers and brave little jackets with gold lace frogs like a general’s pajamas ought to have. Vi has an enormous income, so she has her fun refusing to sell to people she does not like, turning them off cold, she says she never had true social independence until she took to trade. Then the Doyle girls—their _____”

“I wish,” interrupted Blair, “your Nancy Cherri-ton and all the rest would come to grips with reality and then decide whether or not they wanted to remain in business. Toys! Children and a gassed husband shunted into the country! Obscene novels allowed circulation because of a woman’s social

standing—a tobacco shop where you play the snob. Polly, you can't approve of such things!"

"Everyone does it," Polly was injured because her familiar jargon concerning the smarter set had failed to impress. "I may take to something myself. I often threaten Bill."

"What would be your reason?"

"Because it happens to be the thing. Of course, some need the money, so they let the unwashed be their customers and supply it. Don't you agree that a woman has to keep pace with whatever is the thing?" Polly asked with a trace of indignation.

"No. So these women are not striving to bring about a better condition for women, the admittance on their husbands' parts that they are capable of other interests save their homes?"

"Of course not. It is because it is the thing," Polly was impatient at having to repeat her reason. "It will pass soon enough, something else will be the thing, we may become mid-Victorian for a few seasons and take to lace mitts and blushing. This running a business is a reaction after the freedom they had during the war, they couldn't have gone back into drawing rooms without a detour. My word, freedom is a mild term!"

"Then we don't understand each other," Blair

said firmly, "I've had such a different time. I went into business to prove to Tony that he was wrong in his estimate of me. If we are to have a future together, he must share his work as well as his heart. You remember how it was with us at college, how I did the things he did, how I was fairly successful; then we were so much in love that we forgot that for the time being—then we floundered out at the old White Elephant—after which, we floundered even more. At least, I did. The second baby came—we lived in an absurd house on the top of a hill and I did all the housework and went to no-delivery grocery stores and made meatless hash and trimmed my own hats—all so that Tony could go ahead in his own business. I felt as if something was dying inside my head. Sometimes, I believed it was my love for my husband. But I found out it was my own self-respect. And I'm no exception, Polly, you might have done the same if you had not become an expatriate. Oh, I tried to tell myself that my home and duties were all that mattered. It is a great lie and women have come to where they want to tell the truth. Some of us are brave—and foolish—enough to believe homes and outside interests can be made complementary, if our husbands will do their part. Tony has been the handsome, regulation type of

husband who felt I was all wrong and he would soon enough have the fun of hearing me admit that I was. When I didn't, he took the usual attitude of letting me go 'my own way' and assuming the greater share of responsibility."

"You make my head ache," protested Polly, "I can't see why you grow thin and unattractive while Tony is a wonder in appearance; or why you drudge at an advertising agency when it is real work and it is not considered the thing. Why don't you become known for something clever—and easy—almost anything goes if you get the right people to laugh and be impressed? I'm finding everything so changed here. Between ourselves, I really dread the visit—it is torture to adjust oneself, people expect me to be as I was when I left them. I was a bride, terribly in love and tremendously proud of my simple little trousseau. Bill and I have learned to go our own ways, we are both broad-minded and we ask as few questions as are decent. Why struggle for this co-operation thing when you are apt to be bored in the ultimate? But I can't tell this to old friends, let alone the family! It is a tragedy, Blair, to visit people who have the right to call you by your first name."

Blair was glad to leave Polly. She felt, and truly,

she would see little of her. Her dinner for the Arnolds proved an uncomfortable affair. The Arnolds felt they must prove their superiority by impressing the Judds and having a blasé attitude towards everything said or done. Tony resented this, but he admired Polly tremendously. She had what Muriel Sterling lacked—breeding.

After he saw them together, Muriel giving an evening for the Arnolds, which Blair and Tony attended, he realized that Polly in her tortoise-shell velvet draperies lacked what Muriel possessed—bluff. While Blair, in the passé peach colored taffeta, had that despised commodity—brains!

CHAPTER XXVIII

AUNT AGNES's death had been a lingering, hard affair. She kept about until August, although Blair, hearing her moan at night, would often go to her room to find her in a pain-wrecked heap but refusing aid.

In September, the doctor told them there was little to do but wait, her condition proving inoperative. Miss Judd's old fashioned constitution and simple habits, he believed, but prolonged the agony. Whether she suspected this verdict, they never knew. With Tony, an infantile wrench at the great separation, caused him to be awkward lest he betray his feelings, he was ill at ease, even irritable whenever he was in her presence.

Blair betrayed little emotion. She was determined to carry out the pretense that this was a temporary illness. In the spring, Aunt Agnes would be her usual self. She remained undemonstrative but vigilant. Tony would bring his aunt flowers and books—only to rush away for the evening, trying to dismiss her

from his mind. Blair would remain home to read aloud—Aunt Agnes had a sudden flair for Trollope—and plan for the next summer's vacation, the grim masquerade gradually exhausting her.

In November, Aunt Agnes died. For a long week she lay breathing harshly, moaning now and then. The children kept away. Blair stayed home from her office. Tony came in frequently to see her, but he could not remain in the room. He never could bear to see people suffering or smashed up. He could stand it for himself, but not to see anyone else. He marvelled at Blair. The nurse, a matter of fact person with an indifferent attitude towards death, said it was not best for Mrs. Judd to remain so calm, Mr. Judd's emotion was the normal way. She would rather Mrs. Judd cried or fainted. At this, Tony decided that Blair was lacking in general feeling.

Before his aunt died, she told Tony and Blair, as a penitent gasps out a dark secret, her love tragedy. Holding their hands, she whispered that at eighteen, unknown to anyone, she married a bigamist whom she met while visiting in New York. Discovering the fraud, she told only her mother. Soon afterwards, she left to spend a year abroad—during which her child was stillborn. At first, she had been

grateful for the deception, no one had ever suspected the circumstances. The man had died. But, gradually, she felt the urge to marry and be a mother again, yet life had passed her by. She was born to spinsterhood, everyone whispered. So she remained Miss Judd, inwardly rebellious, stifling the desire to tell her story and be rewarded by the world's pity and acknowledgment of her experience. She hoped Blair and Tony would understand—sometimes, she had not been quite clear about it herself, she wondered if she should have confessed to the world?

After his first grief, Tony found himself amazed, almost disapproving his aunt's story. From it resulted the conclusion that "you can never tell what has been or is going to be in anyone's else life." Blair suffered as a result of this conclusion. Had Blair loved someone else at eighteen? Would she love someone else at thirty-eight? Was she incapable of love, an intellectual machine? If his aunt had "fooled" the world for half a century, why not Blair? How blind he had been! It was all very simple—she had ceased to love him and business was her counter-irritant to this condition. So Tony decided he must love himself a trifle harder, thus making up for Blair's discrepancies. He added to this conclusion a mushroom corollary: there was

small use trying to change things. One might as well quarrel with the color of one's eyes. Things were! People must readjust themselves accordingly. Perhaps he was no worse off than most people, Blair was a loyal capable wife and they were, more or less, obligated in holding together because of the children.

Almost immediately, Tony became rather fatherly towards Effie Cudahy, a nice little girl with appealing brown eyes. Effie always minded her mother. Her pay envelope was handed over to mother with prompt willingness because Effie was handed back so much pocket money and the rest was used to dress Effie like any Winter Garden beauty. Effie was in charge of the switchboard, she did typewriting at intervals, intervals was right, according to the firm. She had any number of young cavaliers because Effie overworked the rumor that she always minded her mother, and the young cavaliers could not but approve this. If she minded her mother, she would mind her husband and this reputation won her a choice of escorts every night in the week and two on Sundays.

Effie had long admired Tony Judd, he had such "grand, dark eyes—I'd choose him anyday, if my mother liked him, too." Effie was awed by his

education and club affiliations. She was slightly tart in manner when Blair and the children occasionally met him at his office. She considered Mrs. Judd very ordinary looking for such a husband. Why was she in business when she had a husband with such come-hither eyes? She could not understand it.

Effie preferred older men, anyway, she taunted her salad-day followers. Older men were so—oh, protecting and generous. They knew in advance what you wanted to do and then, if you happened to change your mind—they were not cross. She was not going to be any young man's slave. Her mother had told her not to be. But she continued to collect candy and invitations from the youths while she spent the firm's time dreaming of Anthony Judd. She thrilled with excitement if he asked her to get him a number or if the water-cooler had been re-filled. Judging from the infrequent and commonplace conversations with his wife, Effie felt there was a fair chance of supplanting the present Mrs. Judd. Not that she wanted to be a home-wrecker, unless her mother should give the command. But wasn't Mr. Judd *grand* and weren't his ways compelling, what a beautiful voice and such taste in neckties! Actually, she longed to faint—if she could re-

main a trifle conscious—and have him carry her to the rest room, saying in a solicitous whisper, “Poor little girl, she has been working beyond her strength! This must not happen again.”

This was as far as Effie’s vamping ambitions extended. There was little doubt but what she would marry one of the callow youths and divert her powers of phantasy into her cooking. Her adoration, however, had it’s effect upon Tony. He became aware that Effie blushed every time he looked at her, that she answered his calls as if they were for the nearest fire house, she lingered gracefully outside the office until he appeared and they could stroll to the corner. Once, she ate next him at a cafeteria and gave him her portion of top milk for coffee. When he paid her car fare one night, riding on out to her house because it was raining and she had no umbrella, Effie felt she could not mar the episode by going to a mere neighborhood dance that same evening.

Tony was amused but not displeased by her homage. He humorously alluded to himself as an “ancient married man” but he, too, lingered at the switchboard and sometimes tossed her a flower or box of candy. He told himself she was a nice little girl, there was no harm in his attentions. He missed her when she was away, due to a cold. He sent

flowers, enclosing his business card. She thanked him so prettily, he told himself he hoped this little girl married the right man. He longed to advise her more in detail.

CHAPTER XXIX

ONE December day, Roxy invaded Tony's office. Tony was still suffering from his pretended discovery that Blair no longer loved him and rather consoled by Effie Cudahy's flapper adoration. He was somewhat confused when Roxy, without introduction or preliminaries, asked what Blair fancied she was doing with young Leon Caspar?

"What do you mean?" returned Tony, equally bluff. He was gazing at Roxy's composite ballet and business costume, realizing she looked forty if a day.

"Blair is not fair with any of us," Roxy complained. "I am disappointed in her. You ought to be. I am hoping Leon will be."

"Why?" on Blair's side instantly and forgetful of Effie Cudahy.

"Because she must have left off caring about you, although she may have neglected mentioning it," Roxy waved her hands excitedly. Tony saw her fingernails were cut into a point and highly polished.

His eyebrows drew together in an annoyed frown. "See here," he began firmly, "don't start trouble. Besides, these walls are made of paper. As Blair's best friend, you have nothing to cry, 'Wolf' over."

"Haven't I?" Roxy's eyes sparkled angrily, "wait and see. Ask Blair on Christmas day what Leon has given her. I happen to know, because I made it my business, that he must be either starving or stealing in order to buy her a magnificent ring. A sapphire surrounded with diamonds—how do you like that? She has deliberately fascinated him—for he has a poet's soul and is unsuspecting. I blame Blair for Leon's breakdown, before he came to work for her. Not satisfied with doing that to him, she has won him back into her tuppenny business as a solicitor, only on a commission at that, lets him go on offering his love and youth and——"

"Wait a moment. Blair cannot afford to pay such a person as Caspar a decent salary. He is not worth office space. I argued against her taking him back but she persisted in it because she was sorry for him. Why, Blair does not care as much for Leon as I for you," he ended with convincing rudeness.

"I only wish I could believe it," Roxy flung back, "when I know how much the boy cares for her. It

is so unfair. If she cannot bring herself to love him, she ought not play with him, cripple his future. She ought to be square enough to send him away in no uncertain fashion. She has never realized the fineness of his make-up, how misunderstood he is apt to be. This ring will cost him——”

“What is this about a ring?” Tony interrupted. (He had wondered all morning what trifle—trifle, remember—he could give that little girl at the switchboard.)

“He is buying it for her Christmas, mortgaging his very life to pay for it, misrepresenting his securities. If he cannot meet the payments he will be in serious trouble,” Roxy answered sharply, “I have made it my concern to know what he is doing. I am not crying wolf falsely, old enemy of mine. If you are any sort of a man, you’ll bring this thing to an issue. I’m warning you because——”

“Because you have fallen for Leon,” Tony enjoyed her discomfiture, “it’s nothing to be ashamed of, my dear—only don’t try to disguise it under Blair’s name. Don’t become agitated—I have no intention of publishing these facts. Personally, I’d rather you picked out a life sized proposition and had a little sense——”

Choking with rage, Roxy started to go. “You

will come to see that I am right," she ended threateningly, "you'll have to take steps—Blair is not playing fair—the boy is in danger, he loves her so much that he——"

"Leave my wife's name out of this," ordered Tony, "for heaven's sake, find someone your own age if not your brain power."

Roxy's visit both angered and shamed him. He felt Blair must be getting into situations beyond her depth. He went home, forgetting to smile at Effie, and had a tense few moments with Blair during which he blurted out Roxy's accusations only to be exasperated by Blair's indifference.

"If you don't love Leon," he said in desperation, "and you don't love me, you probably love yourself— isn't that logical? Oh, the children, of course—but I mean as a woman loves someone as you once said you loved me. How do you think a man likes to have a wild-brained person like Roxy come bursting into his office to report that his wife is being worshipped and given expensive jewelry by a low order of animal life?"

"Time will prove that is untrue," Blair interrupted in an equally high handed manner. "He would not dare to do such a thing. As for my not loving you, of course I love you but there are other, more im-

portant things in life beside romantic love. True, it is the essential basis for any marriage—but only the basis. Why does the world frown on unconventional affairs? Have you ever thought of that? Because intrigues over-emphasize this same romance you would like to keep paramount. Intrigues waste and drain energy and focus attention which should be directed elsewhere. They cause the neglect of imperative, impersonal obligations. The result is always chaos. This urge for philandering is often an unrecognized urge for larger self-expression—why cling to the worn-out platform that if a woman puts on her hat and takes the same path out of her house that her husband follows, she is unwomanly, does not love him? He returns to his house—can she not do the same?”

“I loved you so much when we married,” Tony avoided the main issue, his eyes burning with a reddish, unpleasant light, “I thought you loved me the same. I am sorry if you do not—and of course, you cannot help it. But you cannot expect me to continue being sorry. I don’t doubt but what you will be capable of handling Caspar, throwing him out if he tries to be impossible. You have had some practise at it, if I may remind you. You are always clear headed, Blair. I suppose I’ve bothered you by

saying all this. Only you may as well know that I realize the real reason you turned to outside interests."

"You are childishly stubborn," she began.

"You have stabbed something in me," Tony answered with *matinée* fervor.

She caught his arm as he tried to pass by. "Please wait. Has it occurred to you that you have not told me that you loved me for a long time? Think back——"

He looked down at her thin face, the deep sea blue eyes challenging him to answer carefully.

"Perhaps," he admitted shortly. "I only know something has vanished from our marriage that made it the most precious thing in my life. I'll do my best to carry on just as you are doing, but don't let's try fooling each other about the exact situation. You are right, theoretically—so is Roxy for that matter—so is Leon Caspar—perhaps everyone is! Perhaps it is a large enough world to get by in—it was just our home that was not large enough to satisfy you."

He turned, mystified himself as to just where Blair stood in the matter and what would be the outcome.

Tony's Christmas shopping was interesting. He

bought Effie Cudahy a handsome bottle of perfume and another of toilet water. He purged himself of the deed by affording the best steel construction set the town contained, which offering to his son was matched by his daughter's new furs and a good-looking but unromantic umbrella for Blair.

Blair went through the holiday rush with a feeling of unpleasant anticipation—as a child she had called a similar emotion her “going-to-the-dentist feeling.” She dreaded the day before Christmas lest Leon attempt to give her some unsuitable present and she be forced to discharge him. He had become so obnoxious to her that she determined to find him a new position in January. She was hotly resentful of Roxy, although she understood her friend's pathological transition from an absorbing career to an absorbing romance. Roxy was sowing her mild-oats twenty years too late.

On December twenty-fourth, Blair stayed at her office after the others had gone. She wanted to plan undisturbed. As she glanced at her ledgers, she knew the year had netted only a fair return. And she had paid dearly for the same. Ideas were no longer fertile, plentiful things for which she had only to wish. She had to struggle for them. Office responsibilities told upon her. It was her turn to

secretly envy Tony's position as he had once envied her own. She had frequent headaches—and nothing fit to wear to the symphony concerts for which she had subscribed. She wished Muriel would not send expensive presents for the children's Christmas and Peter Cabana would desist his waylaying her to semi-spoof her for being such a success. She almost wished they had planned to go out for the holiday dinner instead of struggling with a turkey single handed, due to her maid's demand for the holiday. She wished she could afford a really competent assistant—how often Tony used to say the same thing. She hoped that Beatrice's teeth would straighten of their own accord and her son stop his recently acquired habit of bloodying the noses of his best friends. It was a gray, troubled world, according to Blair, as she looked down at the bundle-laden passers-by.

(At this same time, Tony was presenting Effie with her present. How it happened, neither knew, but they mutually agreed to have just a smile of ice cream and cake at a nearby hotel—they were tête-à-tête over a candlelit table, in no time, Effie in the seventh heaven of rapture and her appointed escort waiting near the office door in vain.)

A rap at the entrance door to her office suite

brought Blair back to earth. With misgivings, she took the package from the messenger boy. It proved a jeweller's box. Locking the door, as if she needed extra fortification, she went back to her desk before she opened it. Roxy's prophecy had been true. Blair was forced to contemplate the bold sparkle of a diamond and sapphire ring, how paid for heaven only knew—to read on the bit of paper wrapped about its gold band, Leon's frenzied declaration of his love; would she wear this ring in the pledge of friendship and hope of future happiness?

Inconsistently, Blair slipped the ring on her finger—it sparkled and mocked her. Also inconsistently, she wished Tony had given it to her—she would have delighted in wearing it. In imagination, she saw Leon's pale, inspired self and Roxy's bizarre, denouncing person on one side of her and Tony and the children on the other. Such phantasy was absurd—on Christmas eve when the tree must be trimmed, the turkey dressing made, gifts arranged!

For another moment, she sat in distressed reverie, admitting that in trying to do too much, she was doing too little. She was a contradictory opinionated woman with an unfortunate education! She continued to address scathing remarks to herself as she re-wrapped the ring box and typewrote a forcible,

threatening dismissal. As she took the letter from the machine, she admitted that Tony had been right—and she must tell him so. Undoubtedly, there would be more useless words and futile explanations, always that renewal of controversy—why was she not at home? Well, he knew the reason—if he would but admit it.

Inwardly, Blair was hysterical as she called for a messenger boy and waited his tardy appearance. She found herself washing her hands with violent gestures, as if she felt contaminated from her casual trying on of the ring. Yet struggle as she would to become indignant, haughty—all she really wished to have done to Leon was a proper chastisement.

Then, in the climax and turmoil of yearly inventory and personal tangles, Blair found herself turning traitor to her own cause. She was wishing she had not worn such a plain gown when Tony accused her of not loving him. (Heavens, was she such a complete turncoat, hypocrite—could she ever believe herself?) She wished she had worn say—a housecoat of orchid chiffon, she could have convinced him she still cared and he would have forgotten Roxy and Leon.

Blair roused herself with a mental jerk. If she indulged in this sort of thing, where would she end?

Next month would see their twelfth anniversary. Tony had already told her that he must be out of town, she had planned to celebrate with her children.

(By now, Tony and Effie Cudahy concluded their ice cream and were taking a taxi to Effie's home, because the weather was bad and Effie admitted she was tired. Never before had Tony realized what a beautiful little thing she was, a dear home-loving little girl. Effie was praying heaven her waiting escort had abandoned his post or would not notice the whirling-by cab.)

CHAPTER XXX

BLAIR lingered in the office after a messenger had taken away both ring and note. But she did not cry—she thought! She was determined to be optimistic in her desire to make Tony see wherein he lacked, prevent the children's suspecting there could be a rift in their home. She must give them more time, create more of her own atmosphere in the home—but, she must have a different sort of home. She wanted, as originally, only a part time interest in business just as Tony should have been a true partner in the home and not its master. She did not enjoy becoming shabby and tired, she resented the thin spots in her hair, the dullness of her nails. True, she earned an excellent amount of money and Tony seemed satisfied, if not too ambitious, with his present position. But what Blair really wanted, shamed that she was of the desire, was to return home, not into a kitchen but a drawing room! She wanted to become, for a time, a modish matron, a self-indulgent mother—oh, if only Tony could inherit

a gold mine as well as develop a new set of convictions—how wonderful everything might be. But this possibility being remote, she was more likely to become a forlorn near-blonde who began buying the right sort of clothes ten years too late.

It was six o'clock. Blair started up in alarm. Tony was returning from Effie's house, so he did not know of her tardiness. The children were at the evensong of carols, so they did not know of it. Leon had received her angry dismissal and had recklessly thrown the unpaid for ring away, so he did not know about it. No one knew or cared. Blair put on her storm coat and woolen gloves, turned off the lights, drew the shades, left a note for the janitor about a leaking radiator as well as his Christmas fee and started towards the door.

She felt humiliated—as if her thoughts had become public talk. Was it all a bluff, a pose—her years of independent effort? That no one actually knew her turbulent self-confession did not relieve the unrest. She felt brittle of purpose, shallow of mind. A horrible Christmas present—to suddenly become aware one is not what they have labored to convince everyone else they are!

As Blair drove to the apartment, she felt a trifle younger than the sphinx but infinitely more of a

mystery. She forced herself to tell Tony about Leon's gift—unromantically, she stuffed the turkey as she did so, clad in a protecting but not alluring apron.

"I discharged him under threat of arrest if he attempts to bother me again," she said, with drastic gestures directed towards the helpless fowl. "I intend writing Roxy a frank letter. After that, if we cannot be friends, I'll not feel culpable. If she is in love with Leon, it is moon-madness—hand me that needle and thread, will you, please? I'll baste him up tonight—gives a better flavor if you do. Thanks. I must say Sigmund's sent us a very decent bird—so many are cold storage unless you personally pick them out——"

The guilt of Effie's ten dollar perfume and toilet water outlay softened Tony's triumph into a rather commonplace, "Ah, my dear, I was afraid of this, but you have acted wisely" sort attitude.

They fell talking of the children's gifts, the weather, lack of traffic direction. By the time the tree was trimmed and the gifts arranged underneath, it was midnight. Blair went to bed wishing she had the power to sleep through until the new year and waken finding herself shanghaied aboard a Mediterranean-bound steamer where she could do nothing

more consequential than lie in a steamer chair and flag the steward's passing tea cart.

Leon did not appear at Blair's office for the excellent reason that he was arrested for non-payment of the ring. Having flung it poetically into the barge canal, he was unable to retrieve the same. Therefore, he was accused of procuring goods under false pretenses. He proceeded to faintly slash away at his wrists with a ladylike pen knife, which gave rise to sensational headlines about the "attempted suicide of Leon Caspar, advertising solicitor for Mrs. Blair Norcross Judd"—the story containing unpleasant hints that Blair was the person for whom the ring was fraudulently obtained.

While Leon languished in jail, fuming over the situation and feeling reassured because of Roxy's defense of him, Tony saw that the papers hushed up the thing. His attitude towards Blair was priggish. He knew that she was in no way to blame, except for her hiring Leon against his advice. But this reflected on them both—her name in headlines in connection with the ring and an attempted suicide—Mrs. Blair Norcross Judd—ugh, that set his teeth on edge. He knew well the power of a daily paper is transitory but neighbors and business associates would never forget the incident. It encouraged

rumors, which he detested. He was glad that his aunt and Blair's father were not alive to agonize over the situation. The children were too young to comprehend. Blair's affected indifference caused Tony's bruised self-esteem to change into actual displeasure. If only she had cried and said she was sorry and he was quite right—he could have forgiven.

The somewhat humorous angle to the affair was Roxy's eager championship of the culprit. What chance, as Tony asked, had a man in jail to escape her? Roxy insisted on being friendly towards Blair, now that the latter's claim to Leon was entirely disproved. She insisted on telephoning his daily progress until his discharge from the dispensary, Roxy assuming all costs.

But Blair felt her friendship of Roxy was a thing of the past. When, a month later, she heard Roxy had resigned her position and was leaving the city, she did not make inquiries as to what was afoot.

"She will marry him," Tony said, when the matter was discussed, "at least, I am hoping she will. I don't see why tax-payers should be further burdened. What a pair they will make—to think Roxy went loco on the subject of love. Do you remember how she used to dress and talk when we were in college?"

Blair remembered but she wished to avoid anything which might lead to further discussion. She would not admit to Tony that she was unable to free herself of the obsession that she was wrong and the right things were slipping by her, never to return. To have this constant, mental image of Leon, conceited mischief-maker that he was, when she ought to turn her energies to running business and Headquarters—it was like a well intentioned machine which becomes impaired by some vagrant twig attaching itself to a spoke and whirling round and round, always visible, hampering, eventually destructive if unremoved.

Blair tried to revive club interests. She bought Beatrice a fetching mid-winter outfit and went with her to dancing class to enjoy her daughter's popularity. Everyone was cordial but she had nothing in common with these mothers, as prettily dressed as their children. Blair felt conspicuous in her tailored suit. Later, Beatrice mentioned it in the unflinching manner of eleven-year-old daughters.

"I wish you would wear a feathersome hat," she began, "your hair could be curled and creep out around the edges. Your heels are muddy, mother, you tracked the floor and Mr. Van Ostrandt noticed it."

"My child, I stole off from work to watch you play," Blair was indignant and hurt, "what does it matter how I am dressed?"

"It matters to me. I don't want the girls to slam you." Beatrice pressed close to her. "I wish you could be lovely and sparkling—like Aunt Muriel."

Blair sighed. "If I was all lovely and sparkling—would you be satisfied? Wouldn't you want me to do things, too? Aren't you going to do things when you are grown up?"

Beatrice's blue eyes were thoughtful. "I suppose so," she admitted, "I suppose mothers have to be several things, don't they? Have a little family and a little business and oh, lots of different things. That is—some mothers."

Blair suppressed a smile.

"But fathers are never several things," Beatrice complained, Blair wishing Tony were eavesdropping. "Our father spends so much time taking care of himself and telephoning that he just says, 'Yes, yes, be nice children—can you find me last night's paper, that's a good girl, goodbye, everybody.' Life will be lots easier for Sonny, won't it?"

Blair longed to continue the debate. "Don't you think fathers ought to be several things, too?"

Beatrice shook her head. "It doesn't matter what

we think, I'm afraid they will always say, 'Yes, yes, be nice children, here is some money for your bank.' "

"Why do you think so?" Blair was amazed at the well-defined pessimism.

"Because," Beatrice answered easily, viewing the crowded avenue along which they drove, "most mothers would not like it any other way! You can tell now which girls are going to be like Auntie Muriel and which like you. The Auntie Muriel ones are the ones that giggle at the wrong time and cry when they ought to giggle."

Blair almost killed her engine from interest. "What about you sensible little girls who giggle at the proper time and shed tears only on rare occasions?"

"Oh, I suppose we will have to be like you," her daughter seemed resigned.

Blair hastened to drive the auto philosopher home. She felt as if she were being forced to swing round in a circle, now longing for romantic stupor to prove the victor—temporary victor, as she instantly corrected.

She worried because her business dragged, she had engaged an assistant who was capable but ambitious, his salary greatly absorbed her profits. She

was doubtful how long he would remain with her unless allowed to have full sway.

Suppose she gave him full sway, how should she begin womanly renaissance without letting go of her interests and authority? Nor did she care to do this unless Tony would be interested, appreciative. Not only was she becoming lack lustre regarding business, but when she tried to be enthusiastic in the Consumer's League Convention, she found herself critical and bored, taking a diabolical survey of the members although she realized that she, herself, could have stood such a survey least of all. Blair had commercial cabin fever, as Annette Blake had described, just as she suffered from domestic cabin fever, only she did not diagnose these slightly different symptoms.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHILE Tony indulged in flirtations with Effie Cudahy, telling himself some people were born to be wives, some were not; some natures were constructive, others destructive—Blair struggled to keep her ground, to spend so many hours as Mrs. Blair Norcross at her office and so many at Headquarters as Mrs. Anthony Judd, but she lacked any personal interim in which she was just Tony's lovely.

Tony realized he was "slipping" when he found himself planning a hilarious vacation in which Blair should have no part. Tony had formed the recent habit of going alone to musical comedies, he took Effie to the motion pictures, he went on auto rides and roadhouse beefsteak suppers in company with out-of-town salesmen. When he unexpectedly made a handsome bonus from underwriting a large policy,—he admitted, honestly enough, that he would be 'better off if he made no extra money. At least, not while he was restless, inharmonious with Blair and his home. Tony adored his children in the "yes, yes, here is some money for your bank"

fashion. True, he looked forward to the time his son should enter his own alma mater and he become discriminating regarding Beatrice's admirers. But he was not intimate with either child, that was one of the duties and privileges he had never been trained to consider.

Just now, he was fearful lest his bit of prosperity would point the way to his own undoing as a family man. More and more, Tony wanted to play. He had formed the custom of being a reliable family man in the vague, accepted sense of the phrase. Barring school boy expenditures for Effie or sending Muriel flowers in return for her hospitality, Tony had never over-reached himself.

Since Blair did not suspect his receiving any bonus, an unsolicited offering from evil gods, Tony was free to spend it as he liked. Immediately, he rebelled against any sense of limitation—say, having to explain in detail to Blair how he first sighted, then secured the prospect, what per cent of the initial payment was his, what yearly sum he would receive for the renewal—would it not be wise to put this money into a conservative bond? He could picture Blair as she listened, all interest and praise—but most matter of fact. Very likely, she would be wearing a severe waist and skirt. Her

shell rimmed glasses and the shadows from the reading lamp would exaggerate the purple circles under her eyes, the way her hair was strained off her forehead. Her advice would be sensible, disinterested—they would look over the stock market to consider a good buy. She might advise Tony to have his teeth X-rayed with some of this money, so many times teeth affected eyes. She would suggest he give her ten dollars so she could spend five on each of the children. Would it not be nice to subscribe to an additional magazine, probably one of those reflecting the dessicated emotions of the high-brow? After this, they would eat some fruit and Blair would go over her accounts while Tony did his deep breathing exercises. This would be a home evening.

What Tony wanted was a turbulent, extravagant experience—reeking of nonsense and beauty. But he checked these dreams with the resolve to keep on in his job just as Blair continued in hers. If, only, he found himself thinking, she loved him as he once thought she had. Tony nourished this delusion by his wounded conceit. He would know what to do with the money had this been true. He would buy an armful of roses and arrive home in spectacular glory, to find Blair in some soft, pinky

thing. She would hum as she arranged the flowers, interrupting herself to call him her wizard-lamb and so on. He would tell her to pack up her pretties and run off with him for a week end, they would bribe the children with promises of presents—and off they would dash—Blair, blue-eyed and adoring and Tony, masterful and supreme.

He tried to banish this possibility, as Blair struggled to dismiss the Leon Caspar incident because Effie Cudahy became cheap by contrast with the Blair-that-might-have-been. Since she did not love him, Tony demanded a playmate of equal calibre and charm—no little snub nosed switchboard operator. He wondered where to find her.

He stood waiting for a street car, February sleet stinging his cheeks. The truth was, he wanted to fall in love with his wife again. But he deceived himself by insisting that he wished his wife to be in love with him. Tony preferred the neurotic rôle of the injured party. This night of nights, he resented going back to Headquarters where the children's clamor and Blair's tired arrival would combine to create a careless impression. He disliked the apartment with its rather matter of fact fittings which Blair never altered, because she hoped to leave before so very many years. He disliked

every evidence of her business—her clothes, her telephone calls, her check book. It was a relief to no longer stifle the truth! He was an “old fashioned husband” and unfairly circumstanced because of his old fashioned loyalty. He merely wanted his wife at home—at his home. When she left it, he wanted to be her escort or at least have him approve of her going.

Snow shrouded cars crowded with passengers snailed by without stopping. Tony decided to walk. He was reckless of the weather and his tendency to bad throats. With every tramp-tramp of his feet, he could reiterate his grievances. He was willing to pay for everything his wife wore and have the things of the best, too—he wanted her to consult him (verb of elastic dimensions) as to her children, her friends, her recreations! He had tried honestly to be the right sort of a husband, so he flattered, as he splashed through pools of gray snow broth. His coat became doubly heavy with wetness, his hat brim curled down in ruinous fashion. His feet were unpleasantly damp—well, perhaps if he was taken ill, he might not get into mischief!

Probably Blair had arrived home, he knew exactly how she had parked the machine in the garage around the corner and gone up in the elevator

with her impersonal pleasantries to the operator (never to his liking); how she kissed the children and asked questions, going into the kitchen to see if dinner progressed. Undoubtedly, she had thrown herself on the davenport to listen to a favorite talking machine record or else, she scanned the paper and answered the children in preoccupied monosyllables. There she would be when he came in—thick booted but nimble brained, tidy bank account, untidy hair, robust self-expression, thin and pale of face—God, he almost hated her!

He stopped short as this thought refused to be banished. Hate Blair? What a cad! Was he turning from a neurotic into a psychotic—his brain definitely diseased? Such an idea as this would indicate it. He could never hate the real Blair, the once-upon-a-time Blair, he added in sentimental afterthought. Why had she so changed? Why, during their engagement had she given no indication she might change? (At this stage, Tony, too, would have wished for the before-the-altar marriage which Aunt Agnes had favored in vain.) Because of her education had she the right to discard traditions, set up a rumpus about a woman's rights to keep outside contacts, have continuity in her life—what contacts, what continuity?

Roxy, Leon? A dozen prejudiced questions suggested equally prejudiced answers. In another moment, Tony was convinced that he was unquestionably right.

Then why take this money to lay on the altar of such a self-sufficient and unattractive goddess? No, he would use it for a playtime—and no one plays alone.

Realization interrupted Tony's phantasy. Glancing up, he found he had reached the apartment house. He pushed open the heavy front door. He was determined and dangerous, a matter for his own surprise. Would Blair notice any change of manner? There should be no gainsaying him now. She must stand by her often voiced opinion that for a husband to agree to disagree is a legitimate, sometimes admirable affair.

With a reckless gesture, he stepped into the elevator before it had quite come to a stop.

"And how is every little thing today?" he asked the operator, as the metal door slid fast. (Tony's impersonal pleasantries.)

But the man's unfailing reply, "Oh, every little thing is fine, sir," fell on deaf ears. Tony was dreaming about his playmate. There was to be no delay in finding her.

CHAPTER XXXII

TONY found his playmate! But it was three weeks before he realized how complete was the discovery. Then he took her south, stopping in New York while she bought some gowns, one of shimmering peacock embroidery. While this was undergoing slight alterations, the playmate had a heavenly face massage with smooth, cool, ivory rollers such as Chinese beauties used eons ago. She submitted to a water wave and a manicure. In the perfumed atmosphere of Transformation House, as the beauty parlor was listed, she was persuaded to purchase facial creams and powder the consistency of mist. There had to be the right sort of a wrap for this peacock colored gown and a hat that was distinctly "feathersome."

When his playmate faced Tony at the hotel for dinner, a dinner of Tony's choice including essence of gumbo froid, filet of sole Monte Carlo, cold steak and pigeon pie and profiterolles Alaska—he leaned back in his chair and gazed upon her with satisfac-

tion. His brain was pleasantly fizzy as the result of surreptitious cocktails and the waltz which the string orchestra hummed.

"You are my old lovely—only lovelier," he said.

"You are my old Tony—only nicer," echoed his wife.

When Tony entered the apartment, the night of his drastic resolves, he had not found Blair in her "fighting togs" as he grimly pictured. Instead, the maid tiptoed out to say Mrs. Judd had come home in the afternoon and "sort of collapsed"—a doctor neighbor had come in to diagnose it as a nervous breakdown. She needed quiet and rest and Tony was to telephone him that evening.

Kissing the worried children, he had found his way to Blair's room. In old fashioned terms, Tony's conscience smote him because the "wireless" had not warned him of this danger. He must never let Blair know but what he had heard and answered the summons, reaching Headquarters prepared to find her ill.

He sat beside her bed and watched Blair try to smile and ask him to leave a note for her assistant, Donovan, in the morning. She was sorry she was such a nuisance, foolish to have gone without lunch lately. And her eyes hurt dreadfully when she tried

to do Beatrice's party dress by hand. He must not worry—poor old Tony, he did not look any too vigorous himself—it seemed nice to lie still and have him stroke her hands—they did not tremble when he did so—please let the children come in, they would not bother her—she was just tired of the outside roar. She looked up with such trust in her blue eyes that Tony felt an unmanly suggestion of tears. Actually, he longed to kneel before her and confess and receive absolution.

That would never do. Blair was not to be worried but protected. So he led the children in for half a moment while Blair drank some tea. Then he read poetry to her until she fell asleep.

Under the dim night lamp, Tony lingered to watch her. His check presented itself in a new guise. It was to be the means—Tony was innocent of the word bribe—of bringing Blair back into her home, giving Tony his playmate and, most of all, inspiring him to make more and larger checks, no matter what the method involved. The thin slip of paper, which he unfolded and stared at, seemed to whisper all of this, urging that this was the moment for him to act—and recklessly.

Blair had proven an affable convert to Tony's plans. The doctor had told her that she would not

be herself inside of a few days, it was a matter of rest and quiet for some time to come, a change of interests, a little more pleasure. Donovan was not only competent but eager to handle the agency and Tony told her there was no need to think twice as to the expenses, he had made "a killing." The children were angels of unselfishness and she could rely on the maid to stay at Headquarters. Tony insisted he could take a little time off—if she would promise him to buy some new clothes and not quibble over the price. She must trust him entirely—the present was all she need consider.

So it was Judd and wife who left for the Virginia hotel of early associations. Judd alert and attentive busied talking about "large stuff" and wife, pale and attractive, murmuring about "small stuff."

Also, it was Judd and wife who returned to town with Judd still attentive to wife, although occupied with amazing business plans. He insisted Blair was not to be tied down with a routine, that must be understood. She could keep the business nominally (only for a time, he planned) but Donovan must have a free hand in running it. In order to do this, Tony was forced to get as much money—or credit—as he could in the shortest possible space of time. He must convince himself that

money and credit were the same, there was nothing to worry over.

At any cost, he must not allow his re-captured kingdom to be wrested from him. Blair was more delightful than he had expected—remembered. Her very frailness charmed him. He was able to go forth knowing his wife remained at home. But his wife did not realize that to bring this about, her husband's business was on paper.

Before leaving Virginia, Tony and Blair had had a serious, tender talk in which Tony confessed, without reserve, that his loyalty had been straying even, as now his allegiance was redoubling. Tony was an ardent opportunist; he seized Blair's physical breakdown as his time to dazzle, extort extravagant promises, exaggerate the prosperous state of his finances. He was not going to be a poor man any longer; by that, he meant that he was not going to remain on a salary or in the advertising game—not he! He was going to take advantage of his long-standing connections and go in for the real money that was lying around loose. If one had but self-assurance and a few clean collars, the trick was half-way done. He wanted to be the right sort of broker, the sort that looked upon bucketing an order as one does treason. There was always an opening for this

sort of a man and Tony's experience and reliable background would help him tremendously. But he wanted Blair's help by having her be his Blair and his alone, would she? For a little while? Things would be vastly different from the old days. Now, she could "sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam" as well as drive a decent car. She would have her long dreamed of rose garden and library. It was not at all impossible, why did she murmur it sounded staggering, too splendid to be true, that he must be careful? He knew just what he was doing—and why. But she must be at home in order to make his incentive sufficiently alluring. Had she realized how they were drifting, how she was breaking under her own stoical programme? Surely, she was open to compromise.

Blair yielded—temporarily. She saw no other way. She tried believing it would not interrupt her continuity. With normal enjoyment, she was happy in this resumed homage. She, too, wanted a real house, a rose garden, the opportunity to give Beatrice a social background. She was awestruck at Tony's lightning calculations and self-confidence—but she never questioned his intentions. Several times during his plannings, she recalled the timely phrase "mair whistle than wool" but she was suf-

fering from mental inertia which forbade cross examinations. It was sweet just to be loved and protected. It was miraculous to feel rested in so short a space of time, able to write the children long letters illustrated with pen and ink sketches and to have Tony buy her a gold silk sweater, a charming afternoon bag—tell her not to worry, there was plenty of money and she was his lovely! It was somewhat wonderful to shiver and realize how close to the precipice of parting they had come, a more tragic precipice than the one from which Tony had rescued her years ago. She was so weary trying to show Tony her way was right. Beatrice had spoken truly when she said most fathers were destined to do or be only one thing. No matter what Blair's attempts to prove he ought to be otherwise, Tony had remained in his single track.

Curiously, she tried to cast ahead as to what they would do when they began this revised future of theirs. Probably find new friends, entertain, go to theaters—young Donovan would have a free hand, indeed! Poor little business, Blair felt as if she had turned into its stepmother.

Even in this new and somewhat uncertain prosperity, Blair felt the coward for having deserted it.

She knew that her name remained over the door but her interest had been shifted into other channels. As Tony planned to erase her name in due time, so Blair planned, when she was stronger and the novelty of playing had subsided, to resume her interest.

For now, she let business drift while she did the shops in a search for summer toggery. Tony was becoming intimate with Oliver Sterling and Muriel became friendly—and curious. Before she knew it, Blair found herself sitting at the Sterling dinner table and being complimented on her off-the-shoulder white gown by Peter Cabana and other out-sized philanderers who constituted Muriel's body-guard.

"You would never be like Oliver in business?" she would protest to Tony, after several weeks of this exciting readjustment. "I could never feel sure of him, you know—you never did, either. I'd rather go back to Twilddo than have you take any sort of risks. But you understand that, don't you? You know, Tony, I'm always here when you want to explain just how things are going."

Tony ignored the last sentence. "I am like Sterling in this—I am ambitious, content only with real money. But Sterling has become very solid. A few

years ago, one might have questioned his methods—not now. My dear girl, how could he have endured unless he was on a solid basis? He is going to New York this fall—I've suspected it for some time. He's too big for this town. For the present, I am content to step into his shoes."

"What will his future be down there?" Blair was doubtful, unenthusiastic. Try as she would, she could not banish common-sense and years of experience.

Tony demurred. "The American Bank Note Association wanted him," repeating Sterling's pleasing lie and knowing it to be the same. "Only he turned it down—his own business is his best bet."

Blair believed Tony when he made these direct statements. "Do you think our flood of prosperity will be uninterrupted? Dear boy, think what we have spent the last six months—I would not want to count it up in cold figures."

"You need not. I'll count for both. It has been simple—what a great many smarter men than I am are doing and have always done. I took a chance with my bonus money and doubled it—then I went to work and lost some of it but that did not discourage me. I played until I won and so on. Then I invested someone's money and made a good thing for

him—I took no chance and I stood ready to make good, on principle, should I turn turtle—I am out for clients who want a square broker, a financial adviser—no trickster with wild gains one day and losses the next. I've lived in this town too long and my people before me, not to have some kind of backing and reputation. I think you know I'd never abuse anyone's confidence."

Blair was silent. Tony launched into further elaboration of his plans. He was leaving Scott and Carson and had rented some good looking offices near Sterling's suite. He had bribed a crack stenographer from the firm to come along, too. This time, Tony had started off on the right foot.

"I am not as charitable towards Muriel as you have been," Blair could not help protesting. "True, I'm not a handsome addition to her zoo," she added. "I can't think that Muriel would care overly much how her husband made money—as long as she could spend it. What bothers me, Tony, is to have you give up what you are meant to be, the thing you trained for—selected. It—it doesn't 'listen well' as Sonny says when I read him certain stories."

Tony took this chance to turn the conversation into personal channels. Blair need have no fears—only trust him. He did not approve of Muriel,

either. Only, she did get away with things. Tony's new viewpoint was that to get away with things was equivalent to earning them. He did not admit any difference and Blair did not press the point.

CHAPTER XXXIII

No one could have avoided the thrill which came with the smart new house on London Road. Tony bought this the following spring—that is, he paid down a small equity and assumed a staggering mortgage; he paid an initial sum for expensive furnishings and stood off the balance with a swaggering air! Tony was heart and soul in the stock game. Blair could not gainsay him—she no longer tried. Perhaps, she did not realize how hard Tony worked to deaden her realization and common-sense, seeing that she enjoyed herself in an extravagant, exciting fashion which precluded analysis.

The children approved of their new life, they voiced discontent with the former Headquarters. When Blair showed them the new living room with its furniture a dark green olive wood done in orange rep, glazed sky blue walls, open Normandy fireplaces, thick rugs slipping about on parquet floors, Beatrice was spellbound with ad-

miration and Anthony junior gave vent to a shrill:

"This is just the kind of a room I always wanted."

Blair had been led to feel a sense of gratitude towards Tony which disarmed clear headed thinking. Tony had asked permission to do her own room as a surprise. She found he had selected honey colored silk panels for the walls, green and brown curtains of distinctive fabric and the furniture was in graceful, old French mode with rugs and ornaments costing "a young fortune" as she gently accused.

Blair knew these things could not be entirely paid for, she tried to economize by protesting the landscape gardener who persuaded Tony to install an elaborate bird bath and a sun dial. But Tony would brook no interference. Just to prove his affluence, Blair found herself having to select several sets of dishes and goblets with gold banded rims.

They joined the country club and had their new car done in an ultra shade of blue. New and equally affluent friends came to call. The Judds were discovered! Exclusive bootleggers invited Tony's patronage. They began entertaining in a lavish way—they were invited, in turn, to similar affairs where one vied with the hostess about the case of real stuff secured the day before.

People began talking of Tony as they did of Oliver Sterling. He was a comer and his wife seemed a nice sort. She had been in business for quite a while and had made a go of it in a modest way, her profits might have started her husband on his new career. This rumor, which reached Tony in due time, caused him no little displeasure.

No one about the new neighborhood was slow in calling and exchanging views as to the stock exchange, country club scandals and the latest way to set diamonds. By August, the Judds had gone country clubwise in all ways and Blair's name was all she gave to her former agency. She had taken bridge lessons, because Tony begged her to do so, and revived her dancing. In September, she gave an attractive garden party in honor of the Sterlings who were visiting in town a few weeks.

It was not long until Blair realized these new acquaintances were quite like the old—with the exception of their exterior decorations. There were a few booky persons whom she enjoyed, a great profusion of the daddy-women de luxe, one or two mild Roxies, numberless Pollys and Blairs. By November, she was bored with the clatter of this provincial society, the vying with each other as to clothes and complexions, the gossip about

maids and intimate friends, being appointed on philanthropic committees and evading any actual work until the afternoon of the annual reception.

Still attending the country day school, Beatrice and Tony found themselves socially elevated because of their new home. They, too, entertained and were invited to frequent affairs. Beatrice pleaded for a "really French dress like Gerry Wiley has" and Tony junior was guilty of cataloguing people as to the make of their automobile.

Thanksgiving Day, the Judds had open house. Blair, radiant in blue tulle weighted with crystal beads, and Tony, well satisfied, a trifle nervous, greeted their fifty some guests, who drank altogether too much punch and were deaf to the string orchestra crouched behind the potted palms. After which, the guests managed to escape into corners to ask, "Who were the Judds before they came out here—so many newcomers, these days—a Miss Judd lived downtown in a cottage, valuable land, that—he probably came in for the money—Blair Judd used to be in the advertising business—and reform work, too—rather pretty, but nothing striking about her—seems awkward at entertaining, notice it? Mighty good champagne cup, that—Mrs. Sterling knew her when she was a bride. Often

wonder how the Sterlings managed to get where they seem to be—yes, these are dry point etchings Judd bought at a private sale—he has quite a bit of taste—he said they cost a pretty figure—ah, yes, he left the price mark on one of them—well, let's run along, my head is thick."

After several rounds of punch, Cabana pressed Blair's hand and whispered that if he had suspected she was a fairy princess in disguise all these years, a sleeping beauty, so to speak, he would have been an awful nuisance, yes he would—camped on her trail and refused to be discouraged—her husband had better realize that he could not monopolize one of the finest little persons in the land, it was never done in the best society.

Cabana was extremely over-weight these days and equally foppish in his dress. Rumor had him engaged several times a season.

Later that same evening, while Tony indulged in both physical and mental indigestion, Blair played nurse.

"It has not seemed like Thanksgiving," she confessed, when Tony, temporarily subdued, sprawled on her chaise longue, resolving to begin a rigid diet the next morning. "It was a pleasant affair—and cost a great deal more money than I would have

avored. We fairly rushed through our own dinner in order to be ready for—what? A mob of curious critics—come, it is time for another tablet.”

“Thanks. What a foolish habit eating and drinking is!” Tony reflected. “You look awfully nice, everyone was impressed. Personally, I prefer this sort of a holiday to the ones where you did the cooking and had little ambition to change your dress.” Tony indulged in a self-satisfied reverie, glancing around the attractive room. “I’ll not ask anyone if I’ve done well or not. I can answer for myself—I have. I owe Sterling a lot, too, you must give him credit for being willing to help a fellow to a short cut.”

Blair did not answer. She was thinking—and it was not the first time—that she preferred not to investigate Tony’s business, just as she preferred not to admit her declining interest in the agency. Instead, she reminded herself of what several of the new friends had hinted—that Tony had a brilliant future as a financier before him. Therefore, she must help him as she had helped him once before. But it took all of Blair’s loyalty and mistaken strength of purpose to banish qualms.

Just before their fourteenth anniversary, Tony came to notice his children in a new light. He

attempted to make friends with them, he took the boy around with him and saved out an hour before dinner, during which Beatrice delighted him with her original opinions. He insisted that they read books together and analyze their plots.

"Our children are remarkably sound in heart and mind," he told Blair, one evening, "it is with an effort I refrain from quoting 'cute sayings of our little ones.' They are self-sufficient rascals, but you can trust them. I find when they come to a decision, you can't argue them out of it. I also find I am not overly well acquainted with either."

"They have been taught to think for themselves, not as I might think or wish them to think, perhaps—but because their ultimate job was to decide for themselves, so the sooner they began, the easier it would be." Blair hesitated. Then she added, "It would be interesting to keep a time chart—the time we see them, the time we don't—and compare it with the days when I had my office. I believe we would find I have less contact now than then."

"No fair mounting a soap box, just when I've gone and—wait, you are spoiling my anniversary present way ahead of time," he protested, fumbling in his pocket for the ammunition.

Blair was obliged to dismiss her case. For Tony

presented her with one of those white kid and gold edged jewellers' boxes, which he fancied compensated for all things. Within lay his gift—a pearl necklace.

“You adorable pirate,” she cried impulsively.

He flushed at the heedless exclamation.

“They are marvellous, gorgeous,” she praised, unable to resist clasping them about her neck and running to a mirror, “it is a fairy princess sort of thing—you’ve been too generous—and they are truly pearls—beads of captured moonshine—” she was thinking of the imitation string he had bought her so long ago.

“They are lovely like their owner,” Tony did the honors with full gallantry, “now, I’ve chained you again—and what a chase you lead me,” he stopped to kiss her hand.

Appreciative, wondering, somewhat disapproving, Blair did not recall the thought which had suggested itself for some time : that these so-called home women, who were charity patronesses, golf experts, bridge sharks, dancing enthusiasts, chaise longue vampires saw less of their families than did the average woman with a so-called career. Blair herself had passed over two days in the house without speaking to or seeing either child. There had been an en-

grossing archery tournament, a musical tea, a dinner dance which prevented her waking until noon. By the time she was dressed and off for a bridge luncheon, to be followed by a plate supper at the club, the children were home and fast asleep and up and off the next morning, their parents slumbering on!

Blair had longed to set down these facts in a satirical essay launched against the clamoring advocates for women in the home—and nowhere else! But that, too, would have hinted of disloyalty towards Tony. He was playing the game in such vivid, wholehearted fashion, people spoke so admiringly of him and his future, that she must not detract a whit from either his success or his joy. He must not suspect that she was bored with the new setting, the time-wasting, petty persons who insisted that they comprised the “better sort.”

Her one original achievement this season had been to compose a new chef d'œuvre—a champagne glass filled with deadly pink dressing, shrimps hung about the edges of the glass, the game being to push them off into the dressing by a single stroke of the small fork.

CHAPTER XXXIV

By the night of her wedding anniversary reception, the Sterlings coming to town for the holidays and staying over for the event, Blair felt herself a discordant note in the crush of well dressed, flippant guests who played mah-jong and toy racing games for expensive prizes. She watched Muriel's serene self in sea green chiffon bordered with ermine. Muriel had given several costume dances, the important thing about it being that she had studied with a headliner in the Russian ballet at ten dollars per twenty minutes.

Blair caught sight of herself in a mirror—her headdress of golden grapes giving a Bacchanalian climax to her iridescent, sleeveless gown, Tony's pearls about her neck. She was a trifle matronly of figure—breakfast in bed and walking only to and from a car was certain to tell. Her hair was modishly dressed, her cheeks rouged and her eyes bright yet lacking in expression.

Tony was missing from the drawing room, just

after Blair made this surreptitious summary of her charms. She found him in the den talking to Oliver Sterling. Sterling had turned gray about the temples and affected a drawl. Both started as she came upon them.

"What mischief are you school boys plotting?" she demanded, gracefully going on her way.

"Aren't we the lucky things?" Muriel found occasion to ask, examining Blair's pearls with a practised hand, "did you ever fancy, when I first called at the old Gramatan, that we would have regular husbands and real pearls—and everything else costing more than we ought to afford?" her eyes were mocking, as if she read Blair's troubled discontent.

"No, I never did," Blair admitted hastily, trying to think of some effective bon mot which should prevent further interrogation.

"I never thought," insisted Muriel, "you would learn to play with us. You were such a learned young creature. I was illiterate by comparison. You even—let me whisper it, Sister Anne—conjugated Greek verbs as well as baked your own bread. Then you turned into such a business person that you ran down in looks. I can be frank, can't I, honey, now that you've come on so famously? I used to wonder if you had some sort of a horrid germ

thing, like walking typhoid—your face was so sal-low and thin—don't call me hateful," slipping her hand into Blair's, "people never mind what I say because, if they do, I'll soon enough say what they will mind. That is a wise rule—try it, sometime. Dear old Blair, wait until Tony has learned the game and comes to New York. You'll grow terribly keen about being there. Entre nous, these people are amusing, don't you agree? I adore coming back to be entertained and stared at, it gives me a lot of after dinner stories to tell when I go back. Oh, Peter Pumpkin Eater, you are listening—'ess 'oo is—you ogre," as Cabana came and paused beside them. "Take me out for an ice. Say a bead for me, Blair, that I resist his charms."

Blair told herself she was in a bad way if Muriel's monologue could alarm, as well as depress her. She felt stifled, as if forced to inhale musk or double strength gardenia extract instead of oxygen. The evening dragged to a hilarious conclusion. She was glad when Tony again demanded his digestive tablets and complained that the demands on his wine cellar exceeded what he considered would have been a liberal supply.

"Don't let's give parties like this," she proposed, "either I am a base hypocrite or else everyone else

is. Everytime someone came in, I seemed to see them as they really were. It appeared we had invited the inmates of some zoo to come to dance and drink. Once and for all, I do not like so-called society. I like friends, real people not fashion plates, dishonest dandies. I wish we could go to Maine this summer. I had a letter from Amy Sprague—you remember what a rare soul she was? They have a little colony of booky, poverty stricken souls. Let's go to see them, be rid of social snares. I'd like the children to spend just such a simple summer as the Sprague children will. I'd not mind a few weeks of co-operative housekeeping with people like the Spragues and the McClintics, the Glenny girls—they are all there and Amy says this year the Martins are not coming which leaves their log house, Shanty junior, to be occupied. It would be a splendid chance for you to become cured of indigestion while I gracefully dropped these kind of connections."

Tony was not impressed. "I wish you would remember a few of the things you once said about doing housework without conveniences. You have a most convenient memory, my dear. And why poke off to Maine and a browbeaten school masters' colony when we are invited to real resorts and I

want to tour all over and back again? This summer ought to see us deciding where we are to have our own camp. It is imperative we do have one, although you may not be aware of it. I cannot disappear into some unknown hamlet if I'm to go on as I've been doing," he flung off a shoe, slightly tight it had been, too, with a violent gesture. It hit the edge of Blair's dressing table and caused a tinkle of cut glass and silver.

"There—doesn't that sound like our parties?" was her quick remark. She was brushing her hair, rejoicing in its holiday from pins and combs. "The only sound lacking was the pop of a wine cork. That is what this set amounts to. Oh, Tony, you are too real to be deceived much longer. If you are going to build up an enduring career as a financier—ought you not be a better judge of human nature—of values? I do want to go to Maine. I want the children there. We cannot drag them from house party to house party and a camp would be the only other alternative. Besides, we ought to keep up our college associations—why, I haven't been down at the club——"

"With my income and prospects, I'd make men such as Sprague and McClintic uncomfortable! And I know what that feels like. No, we have gone

beyond them and we cannot turn back," he drew off the other shoe with great care and quiet.

"I don't like any career that depends so utterly on social evidences of prosperity," Blair objected. "It is like a woman's trading on her sex to get her across in business. It never lasts for long." Peering in the glass, she discovered her eyes to be blood-shot, which annoyed her since Muriel's eyes had remained a clear, bright green and it had been Muriel not Blair who made ravages on Tony's wine cellar.

"Don't you? I'm so sorry," Tony was on the flip-pant defensive, decidedly irritated. Of late, Blair had noticed he controlled his temper only by a great effort. Trifles annoyed him and his annoyance was a storm signal for an actual brain blizzard. He was "loud and fussy" his children complained, if he mislaid a book or found the car needed washing or the telephone connections happened to be poor. Almost unawares, Blair had redoubled her efforts to keep everything smooth and harmonious about the house. She knew it would lull him into harmony to find his favorite dishes for dinner or herself looking well dressed and playful or to have her tell where they had been invited and who had called. Life with Tony was coming to be like living on the edge of a volcano.

“What is it you do want?” he demanded, when Blair did not answer. “I try to give you everything a man can give a woman—you accept it yet complain. After a really remarkable reception, the best people in town at our elbow—and—.” He glanced at the jeweller’s case containing his pearls. “You turn about and want to go to Maine with half-starved professors and hollow-cheeked women! You would bury yourself up there and pretend to enjoy the ‘smell of the lamp’—you don’t seem to realize that I made a pretty big play for your love, to convince you that you must stay at home. Some men would not have tried it—not after all those years. And many men could not have done it, had they tried. You seem to want—.” Tony’s head was in a whirl. His conscience was not pricking him—it was mocking. True, he had succeeded in keeping his wife at home, he persuaded her to return to the squirrel cage because he gilded it—yet he was discovering this was not soul satisfying. There were too many times when something within him suggested danger ahead, murmured, “You have been cheap—therefore, you will pay dearly.” Tony tried to laugh at this, suggest to himself it was the backwash of having been forced to patronize Sunday School libraries in the early nineties.

His supreme struggle for what he termed self-

preservation and what was self-deification had caused him to be super-sensitive to criticism, ever alert for signs of failure, suspicious of everyone save himself. He had preserved his home and his children's home, he insisted and, as soon as it was possible, he would see that Blair's name was removed from her agency door and a To-Let sign substituted.

"We won't argue tonight," Blair said wearily, "many things can happen by next summer. I can take the children there for a fortnight, alone."

Tony darted an angry look at her. "Where would you suggest for our permanent summer camp?" he asked, trying to change the subject and avoid a temper spasm, "I'm determined to have one of those 'primitive' affairs with four baths and a billiard room. I want a place people can say——"

Blair put her hands on his shoulder. "Tonibus," she said seriously, "I want you to go to sleep right away and wake up the pleasant, even soul you used to be. You are too over-powering and elegant to stand close inspection. It fools the world but not your wife. Come, promise me."

He was not to be dissuaded. "Sometimes, you seem naturally unsympathetic," he complained, as he turned to obey, "as if you thought you knew so

much more than the rest of us that it was hardly worth your effort to tutor us so we could make your grade. Don't send me to bed like you do the children," realizing he had started to obey, "and don't call me Tonibus and push that damned pill box at me. I'm fed up on medicine. I'm going in for one of those mind cures and have a prosperity circle meet here weekly—no *joie de vivre* about you though, is there? You take my presents and you use my money to buy gowns and you go to places like a well-bred automaton. You don't share my pleasure or success. Sometimes, I wonder if you are truly proud of me—as proud as I am of you! And please don't stare at me as if I was a lost soul, refusing the only chance of a rain check. You are neither my nurse or mentor—you're my wife."

Tony was loath to stop the discussion, it was like taking a little more of a stimulant to continue the deadly effect of that already taken. He was not angry but quarrelsome. His own sense of shortcomings expressed themselves in symbols. As Blair refused to answer further, Tony asked himself what was the use, after all; she could not have loved him as he thought she had—blow the solar system, you might as well grab a Reno time table and do the thing right.

Tony's jealousy, a counter-irritant to mental turmoil, asserted itself in various guises. At first, Blair had been surprised, almost amused at this. Then she became indignant; now, she was indifferent. First, it was Cabana that Tony accused was of special interest to her, she probably admired his uncouth success, she used to tell how he called on her at the little Bungahigh. Blair felt it beside the point to argue. Then it was her assistant, young Donovan (not married a year), over whom Tony fumed and mistrusted—did Donovan want to buy the business outright—well, why not let him—how often did she see him—why bother with this enterprise when she had more engrossing things closer at hand?

To have answered these questions would have been a Robin Hood's barn affair. She knew Tony did not seriously believe what he said, it was an unconscious delirium of a troubled mind. But it was wearing to endure with a man so torn with unrest. There were other men in their new set about whom Tony conjured up suspicions. If Blair liked anyone overly much, please tell him before they went further—he wanted to be certain as to their future love. (Which meant he was uncertain as to his own future).

"I have never loved anyone but you," Blair said in desperation, as spring ended and summer plans matured according to Tony's dictation. "But I have come to believe that it is a misfortune to be a monogamist. You would, no doubt, have been unsuspecting had I been an experienced flirt. If you continue to talk about my not loving you and appreciating you, getting tense and silly, your face like a thunder cloud, your blood pressure alarming, I think I'll do something that will give you cause for these outbursts."

This warning made a temporary impression.

"How can you do business with such a mental attitude?" Blair asked a few days later, "I have quite given up your ever discussing it with me, but I am curious to know if you give others the impression of chaos and uncertainty you give at home? I wish you would listen when I say I do not wish more things until the old ones have been paid for. Stop this boastful display of pretended wealth—or is it wealth—tell me, Tony, how much money have you, how much do you owe? This sort of a house was never our idea—not way, way back—we wanted a brown shingled, roomy place with fruit trees and dog kennels and——"

Tony put his hands over his ears. Sometimes, his gestures were so grotesque, they provoked his chil-

dren to mirth which resulted in their leaving the table. He seemed unaware that the servants heard his bombastic declarations. Club men spoke of his increasing conceit and old friends shook their heads and passed him up with: "Judd's gone beyond us—I wonder if he will be able to find his way back?"

"Stop," he thundered, "I've given you all I thought——"

"Any wife ought to have," and Blair left the room.

From that moment, she blamed herself for having declared a truce. She was crouching mentally, ready to spring out and declare herself when the chance should come. She affected indifference to his moods, trying to gloss them over before the children. No matter what Tony urged, she was lack lustre as to the vacation plans. Tony was truly grateful that she had given up going to Maine; he expressed his gratitude by presenting her with a new sunshade, like an inverted bowl of pink roses, which he unearthed on a flying visit to New York.

As things were now, Tony had succeeded in planning for the summer months. As soon as school closed, they would shut up the house temporarily and take the children to camp. Then, Tony and Blair would proceed on a round of gay house-parties.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE last formal tea of the season, at which Blair assisted, sent her home with the composite impression of candlelight, insincere adjectives and mussy petits fours. At dinner time, she remembered it would soon be Muriel's birthday. Tony had been emphatic in asking that she remember it. So she left an early call for the next morning and trailed through several gift shops in search of "something different."

She unearthed a set of glass perfume bottles in the shape of Noah's Ark animals; these, with her love and best wishes, would answer. Beatrice, who coveted a like set, followed her mother about while she was packing them.

"Are you going to have your name in the paper again?" she asked, "Not just for parties, but like you used to have?"

"Want me to?" said Blair, almost longingly.

"I think you ought to keep in practice," was her daughter's grave advice.

Blair, hungry for substantial pastimes, refused to discuss the "ins" and "outs" of the matter. Before lunch was halfway ended, Tony hinted that he was hard pressed for ready money, everything would be more than all right within a few weeks but for now—there was a tiny squeak and oh, she would not be interested in figures and details—take his word for it. Why was the girl so long in bringing his coffee? He must have ready money. He had nothing to draw upon—and he did not wish to borrow and have it noised about. If he could have about two thousand, just to turn himself around with and shoo away narrow-minded suspicions—this coffee was like melted mud—he had about decided to get a pair of Japanese in the fall, they could do the whole thing, garden and all—and lend distinction besides. Sometimes he thought an apartment for the winter, a very excellent apartment, and a summer camp was the wisest way to live—suburbs were suburbs no matter how one tried to lie about their being ideal year-round homes—and—what was it he was saying? He needed ready money—and—would she come up into his den for a few minutes, did she ever have a ringing in her ears, like sleigh bells sounding far away? What did it mean? Arterial tension—nonsense, what an alarmer she was. Yes, he had that

ringing sometimes, but he believed it came from needing a vacation . . . about the money, she was certain to stand by as she always had. He had been a cross ogre, too, had he not? Please forgive him—he was entirely to blame. His jealousy was absurd—no doubt of it—he only meant——

Here, Blair took occasion to point out that such jealousy is not a sign one is unhappy because uncertain of another's affections but a form of admitting that they are uncertain of their own. Another time, Tony would have made an issue of this, but he was in pursuit of ready money and the result of the conversation was that Blair—like any pawnbroker's wife, she thought—gave back her pearls—"temporarily, lovely," Tony repeated. She told him that she never wanted them again, please sell them outright and use the money where it is needed, she would much prefer he did this—they were cheapened in her eyes. Instinctively, Blair knew the money was to be used in ways of which she would disapprove.

"You don't want them?" Tony was all indignation, "is that the way you react to a call for help? Oh, perhaps you never wanted them."

He drove off in high dudgeon. Blair wondered if she would dare to understand Tony's business. And what could she do, if she did understand it?

It was coming to her with unpleasant force that she had walked out of her kitchen more easily than she could from her drawing room.

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Before the Judds left for their first summer episode, Mr. and Mrs. Leon Caspar, formerly Roxy Hubbell and Leon of the languishing heart, re-entered Blair's horizon. She welcomed them because they recalled other, more sincere days and ways, provided a contrast to this present situation of money, money, guess how much money?

To Blair, Roxy and her "young husband" as she honestly dubbed him, were at least real persons, still struggling, no matter if Roxy was frank in having to admit that she could not trust Leon with too much pocket money at a time. Leon was improved, although he was still the selfish dreamer. But he admired and was grateful of Roxy's efforts, he appreciated her love. He called her "muzzy" to Tony's everlasting nausea and did not resent being treated as if he were about to approach man's estate.

Most surprising was Roxy's successful and novel enterprise. She had commercialized the very art she long despised—home making. Realizing "young husband" was a financial zero and choosing that her

days as a lawyer be ended, Roxy decided to open a bright little shop in a middle western city. It bore the intriguing sign: The Comforts of Home—a unique establishment, neither a woman's exchange nor a man's chop house. It was, as Roxy insisted when pressed for details, the comforts of home, no more and no less. It was for the convenience and solace of every bachelor man and maid, widowed or married persons who had given way to hotel living. Roxy had proceeded on the theory that no modernist breathes but what has some favorite food, habit, accessory, recreation which dates from the time of their initial, old-fashioned home. That it was their privilege not to lose this link with the past, enjoy childish comforts had caused her to make the venture. Why not have some of the comforts of home a pleasant reality rather than a pathetic memory?

If a man wished a certain sort of a dinner, a particular way of having his clothes mended, his stockings folded, if he liked to read sentimental poems or look through antiquated art albums while sitting in an easy chair, beside an old walnut table—Roxy saw to it this came to pass. If someone hankered for the homemade articles of her childhood, wished certain personal daily services rendered as they had

been rendered by her mother or aunts, Roxy endeavored to meet the demand. She, radical and feminist, had been clever enough to gather together those who could produce these comforts, paying them fairly yet reserving a decent profit. She had been amazed to find so many women who could mend, do fancy cookery, knit, crochet, and so on. And she was equally amazed to find an even greater number willing to pay for the same, to have the right to come into one of her series of cubicles, furnished with dramatic fidelity as to detail. There was a large farm kitchen, an old-time dining room, a best parlor, a few quaint sitting room corners. Here people flocked to "eat in the kitchen like we used to do" with food served direct from the stove, herbs drying on rafters and a tabby cat purring under foot.

This shop was being duplicated in as many cities as possible, so Leon supplemented, Leon being the straw-manager of the enterprise.

"He's a dear, if you understand and don't expect too much," Roxy confided as soon as she was alone with Blair, "I never thought I'd assume such a life job—but I'm not complaining. I let him play around as a manager while I run things. Don't ask me why I got into such a home-folksy line, unless it was because I was removed from it and, there-

fore, able to see the need. It was like painting a storm while in a comfortable, steam-heated studio. At least, I have found that people swamp me with orders. The comforts of home—it gets us all on the jump! And a satisfying game, too.” Roxy’s face softened as it had when she mentioned Leon. “I’ve brought to life more women who were sentenced to a corner than you can imagine. I have them dress ‘like mother used to’—and they get on so well, they start bank accounts and express political convictions, play favorites with the customers. It peps them up no end. I found them in their sons’ third story bedrooms and in their daughters’ kitchens—lonely boarding houses. I even invaded the old people’s home. You should see ‘mother’s’ spirit when she knows that she is really wanted. I say, Blair, most respectably married women face a hideous old age, unless they have a husband like Tony who suddenly goes out and makes a fortune. Well—I’ve come to my senses as much as can ever be expected,” she finished bluntly. “But to think I find you here, dressed like a doll, Tony as nervous as he is overweight—how did it happen?” Roxy leaned forward, her strong fingers patting Blair’s arm. “By the way—want a formula for getting along comfortably?”

"I do," Blair was impressed as well as amused.

"Learn to expect just so much discomfort," was the answer. "Now, consider all I am," Roxy was the former stimulating personality, "so far from perfection that I cannot expect perfect bliss with that irresponsible Leon whom only I dote upon. And he takes advantage of the fact, too. Neither will I stand for too much unhappiness. It is seldom necessary. I use my brains about being married to Leon as much as for the shop. The original trouble with me was being too one sided—I had to find a balance wheel. I don't expect to make a fortune or become young and beautiful at sixty. I don't hope for continued devotion from Leon—but I'm content, I've had a small measure of it. And you, dressed for a court reception—are you——?"

"We'll get nowhere if you try talking about it," Blair protested, "Tony has done amazingly well, finance seems to be his right niche. I don't know whether his work pleases him. I'm not altogether sure there is much work. He's reverted to the hermitlike habit of keeping his own counsel—he merely loses his temper for my benefit. That is unfair, too, for he's been wonderfully generous and kind. He gives me everything, Roxy—my way of helping him seems to be to play up to the

butterfly rôle he wants me to enact. I don't do it willingly—that much I admit. I don't intend to do it for always. Donovan is eager to leave the agency and branch out into his own interests—he ought to, at that. The business is dying a slow, painless death. I don't think about it any more than is necessary; it seemed inevitable. The children's social needs—and Tony's—oh, yes, I'm content, too, Roxy dear.”

Roxy did not contradict. Blair glanced through the French doors to see if Tony was in sight, he had been forced to ask Leon if he would look at the grounds.

“I owe you an apology—you know—about Leon. What a fool I must have seemed! Poor Leon, he tried to make you his muzzy, didn't he? Well, you acted wisely—even if I do adore him. And remember, if you ever need me, I'm running the Comforts of Home and you can have as many as you want of them.” Roxy was actually meek.

The men rounded the corner and Blair rose to meet them. Tony did not urge the Caspars to stay for dinner. It was a deucedly inconvenient time to have come, he fretted, afterwards. The house was halfway dismantled and if they were going to start their shop in town, it meant they would try to resume

intimacy with the Judds. He had had hard work to refrain from placing Leon on a wheel barrow and trundling him to the extreme rear. He was incapable of seeing any serio-comic adjustment between Leon and Roxy. He was intolerant of both, all he remembered was Leon's Blair-fixation and the newspaper publicity which resulted. He hoped Blair gave them to understand they could not be friends. Now, had it been Polly and Bill Arnold returning to America, that would have been cause for rejoicing. But there was small chance of that—indeed, Polly was about to be presented at court.

Blair did not argue the matter. She had other things to think about—Roxy's strange transformation, the practical duties attendant on closing the house, the children's camp, her clothes, Tony's nerves!

CHAPTER XXXVI

A FEW days later, the Judds started on their summer campaign. The first move was to take the children to King Mountain Camp, staying a few days to see how life was to go for them. Blair enjoyed the camp. Tony, who had taken up his quarters on the boys' side in an honest effort to be considered a 'good sport,' became ill at ease and decided he must be feeling the elevation. He did not approve of roughing it, as he once championed—he admitted to an atavistic tendency to dress for dinner and see the beads glistening outside the cocktail mixer. He preferred a vaudeville bill rather than sitting in a circle around a smoking camp fire and taking part in the juvenile discussions. So he cut short his stay and went on to New York on business. From there, he wired Blair to go direct to the Sterlings' cottage. He would join her as soon as possible.

Reluctantly, Blair left her children and reached Muriel's villa to find the garden ablaze with June

splendor and the drawing room crowded with Cabana's familiar pomposity. He was one of the accepted features of the establishment—as were the collection of figurines or Muriel's clothes. Cabana's money had increased many times since developing one-family tracts in the light of a pseudo-philanthropist. He, too, handled big deals—mystifying term to the layman. He gave too substantial evidence of prosperity to question his wealth. Cabana was not on paper, therefore he was fond of advising others what to do with their money. He did this in such an interested, intimate fashion that they believed he had a personal concern in the matter. But he became unresponsive when anyone hinted at this—he was always “heavily involved just at this time.”

Whether Oliver objected to his presence or whether he had the right to object was one of those unanswered questions which the Sterlings' guests never wearied of asking. Certain it was that Sterling in no way was connected with Cabana's business nor did Cabana invest his money through Sterling's offices. Regarding each other, they were polite but brief. What dialogues took place between Muriel and Oliver, only the walls of Muriel's boudoir could have attested. No one had reason to

affirm the suspicions of unlovely scenes in which Muriel triumphed over her husband, sneered and browbeat him into defeat, told him she tolerated him only because it was good form to have a husband about, even if he did not make what she considered "real money." He looked like some glum spectre when he came into her drawing room. He ought to be grateful for all she had done for him. But for her ambitions and personality, they would still be living in a provincial city, in some cramped apartment, patronized by his moth-eaten family. She had developed him—now, he must obey her and question nothing she chose to do.

But with all the Sterlings' success and Muriel's clever prettiness, she was still on the outer edge of society, asked only to the large affairs given for charity. Never had she managed to be included in the sacred, unreported functions where everyone called everyone else by their first name. This was yet to be achieved.

Muriel made fun of Oliver to Cabana just as she made fun of Cabana to herself. Of all the men she knew, Tony Judd seemed the most handsome and likeable. Many times, despite social ambitions, she called herself a fool for not having encouraged Tony's homage during the days when he

came alone to her house and she could have fascinated him. She might have done worse than to have selected Tony as a guardian angel instead of Peter Cabana, for Tony proved he could make money, too. Not as much or as recklessly as Oliver, he was still rather virtuous, Oliver complained, but under her influence, he might have accomplished wonders. Cabana was an ungrammatical vulgarian, a bore—but his fortune caused even the inner circle to murmur respectfully and since he had become fond of her blonde self, she could not afford to waste the opportunity.

When Muriel left Blair's room, after a welcoming and intimate "my dear" and "my dearest" heart to heart visit, she felt she had much for which to be thankful. Dressing for dinner in a flamingo chiffon with sparkling jet ornaments, she told herself she had every reason to be quite satisfied, as a matter of fact. Blair looked old, partly due to ethereal ideals and unshaved eyebrows! She was an outsider with Muriel's guests but provided Muriel with an excellent foil for her own wild charms. Tony had wired Blair he would make the train for the Sterlings tomorrow afternoon. Muriel was to send in to meet him. She was almost buoyant because he would arrive in time for her dance,

there was always a telling contentment in knowing she had to struggle for a handsome, married man's affection.

A week later, Tony and Oliver left the cottage—and their wives. Cabana had gone to Boston on a business conference. It was an almost male-less circle left to amuse themselves until the coming week-end. Blair felt as if she had walked into a cell, done by a fashionable interior decorator, and sat stupidly by while the key was turned and pocketed by her gaoler-hostess. She counted the very hours until Tony should return and she could persuade him to stop these mad dashes to the city, these inane visits with uncongenial people.

She had resolved to remain a polite hypocrite until the following Friday night. Then she must ask Tony to take up the burden for her. She would insist she go to see the children and she wrote them to this effect. She also noted the fact that Tony had left her with little money. After tipping a maid, she would be on postage-stamp rations.

Tony came Friday night, only to be on the offensive when she proposed cancelling the St. Lawrence invitation to friends of his. She had begged off from the week-end dance Muriel was giving, so Tony spent an impatient half hour before he went down-

stairs. Cabana and Oliver still remained away but Muriel filled her thinning ranks with town men who were delighted to dance with Mrs. Sterling—and then gossip about her afterwards.

“You must go up there,” Tony said impatiently, in reference to the St. Lawrence visit. He offered no interlude of polite argument. Blair was rather tolerant when Tony “worked himself into a rage.” It seemed a more or less logical process but she could not brook this sudden flying into a fury as the result of a single remark.

“If you don’t go there, stay on here,” he added, “we have closed the house, the children are happy and visiting is not the expense living at a resort hotel would be. Besides, we could not get accommodations at this late hour. If we went back to town, every relation passing through would route themselves so they could be with us a week. We have no maids—why unsettle everything? Be reasonable. Sometimes, I have to tell myself there is no satisfying you—you cannot, will not understand,” he stamped about the room, his hands jingling loose coins in his pockets.

“It is you who do not understand because you don’t want to,” she said.

“You are neither a flirt or a peacock, I’ll grant

you," he added, passing her. "I'm coming to believe you'd be satisfied in a print frock and a tramp in the woods—you don't seem to know what to do with yourself in our new position—and I did it all for you! Watch Muriel, schemer that she is, she obtains admirable results. She will land Sterling on the top wave in spite of himself."

"Do you hanker for the top wave?" Blair said in the same, steady tone. "You who used to decry the aimless, brainless pastimes of such people as are below stairs?"

"Don't start the 'used to' stuff. That gets me all wrong. Later, when I am a bona fide millionaire, we can adopt the 'I used to' patter. Not now—while I'm still scrambling. Yes, of course, we used to do lots of things," he added inconsistently. "Want me to enumerate them? We used to be sentimental boy and girl, we used to be monotonous husband and wife, the children disturbing our sleep. I used to wear ready made clothes and eat forty cent plate luncheons and you used to do the fine washing and paint the furniture—I could go on like this until midnight—and where would it get us? We can never go back to yesterday. Progress is an irrevocable law and I, for one, have no desire to try breaking it. I've gone on until I'm regarded

as a rich man—you have to bear me out. If you don't like society and long for your old pastime of upsetting domestic tradition, then we can't stay together. That's flat. Down to the bone truth—jove, my head aches—I wonder if the stuff I ate coming up was tinned——”

“Let us choose a wiser place to talk,” advised Blair, pointing towards the open windows. “This may be an effective setting, the faint sounds of a waltz are apt to come wafting in as they usually do along about the third act but——”

“There is no time like now,” Tony insisted, his temples throbbing, “you are so competent and matter of fact, hating artifice in any form—tell me, do you or do you not want to be my wife? It is better to be frank than drag along—oh, don't bring in the children, I know what you will say. The children will not be harmed half as much as—I will be living with someone who does not appreciate me,” he drew in a deep breath and turned his face away. Had he been a woman, Tony would have burst into tears. Instead, he swept aside a litter of toilet articles from a frail stand, their discordant clatter soothed his nerves. He had to have something upset, protesting—Blair's calm was maddening.

"Ah, there is the waltz," was Blair's deliberate answer. "It will be pretty in the courtyard—wonderful moonlight. Muriel will add considerable charm to the landscape herself, can you imagine another woman wearing pleated white satin and not looking a barrel?"

Tony concealed his failure to impress by a coherent, "We will finish this subject later—I wish you would consider what I have said——"

He went down to the dance to claim as many numbers as possible with Muriel. True, he was ashamed of himself long before the evening ended, he longed to run upstairs and ask how Blair's headache was—and have her tell him she understood his brain storm. But he was not keen to tempt her to further argument. She had had too much time to think up a rebuttal. In the morning, he would tell her he had been over emphatic and would she realize the strain under which he worked, the tension caused by competition (and too much smoking, yes, yes, he admitted it—was she satisfied) and the gnawing suggestion that she did not love him as much as he did her?

But Blair refused to discuss the subject to Tony's surprise. "I do not think it good form to become serious at a house-party," was her light rejoinder.

"You look dashing in your cream flannels, Tony, only I'd wear a blue satin tie. By the way, do you realize you have not given me any spending money since we came—and you borrowed twenty of what you gave me when we left town?"

He gave her all that he had on hand and promised a check soon. Then he lingered near as if wishful of further remarks.

"I have decided to leave here on Monday," she said in a calm, final manner, "I have written the Clipstons that I must be at the children's camp from Monday night until Friday—that will get me to the next 'detention house' in ample time, I am sure. You say you must go dashing off to New York—yet you expect me to go on alone when I do not know these people intimately. They are so proper and wonderful, according to your descriptions, you have me frightened ahead of time. I dread the maid's unpacking my trunk, she will feel superior after inspecting my lingerie."

Tony did not gainsay her. He was anxious that the Clipstons like Blair. Mr. Clipston had been a friend of his father's. He assured Blair that Mrs. Clipston was most interested in social service work, if it did not interfere with her massage

appointments, he hoped they would have much in common.

“All right,” he ended briefly, “have it your own way. Go to visit the children. I’m due in New York Monday afternoon.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

MURIEL was not sorry to have them go. As long as Blair kept above stairs and gave Tony over to her authority, she considered the Judds desirable guests. But when Blair, heavy eyed and silent, came below to make Tony discuss the garden botanically—and drink buttermilk—Muriel was suavely eager in her goodbyes.

Tony and Blair parted at a junction station, Tony's train going on to New York and Blair waiting an hour for the mountain-top local to come by. She had wired the camp master to meet her, her wardrobe trunk had been expressed on to the Clip-stons', a bag with her hiking clothes was all she required for the visit.

She began thinking of the children, the tenseness lessening as she planned for a ramble on Tuesday. On Wednesday, she might hire a bus and give a picnic at some spot discovered during their rambles. Thursday, they might treat the camp to a wiener

roast—Friday, she must be busied with going away. She was determined not to think ahead, to reserve these few days for her children, numbed as to what might follow, a sort of nerve-blocking anesthesia. She shook her head to emphasize this, unconscious of the station master's stares.

She was driven inside the station by a shower. Here, she found herself breaking her resolution, thinking of Tony on his way to New York. Likely enough, he was happily ensconced in the smoker, trading hip flasks and stories, fretting, fuming, rebelling between times.

Blair resolved to make a critical unflinching summary of their marriage. From their wedding day, she would begin weighing carefully, fairly, for either side, the incidents and emotions contributing to this present dilemma. Having done so, adjusting blame as best she could, she would present her case to Tony, decide upon a dignified separation if necessary. Blair did not wince at the word divorce. Tony did, no matter what he said in the heat of the moment. No matter how admirably she presented her case, Tony would not be the aggressor in severing this complex partnership.

Blair began digging her parasol tip into the rotting basement of the station, as if symbolic of her

search for the underlying truth of the situation. Because his wife demanded to continue her interest in the things for which she was adapted, Tony had maintained an attitude of careless indifference, inwardly hoping for failure. When failure did not materialize, he admitted her success with ironical grace, only to become grumbling, resentful, antagonistic. This attitude, often unvoiced, had demanded its psychic toll of her as such an attitude must, although the world remains in ignorance of the crime. It was impossible to say, "This day he discouraged me" or "That was the speech that crippled my courage, lost me my self-confidence," admitted Blair as she dug savagely with her parasol point.

In the world's eyes, Tony had been admirable. But he had stubbornly refused to admit that men can gain through the larger life of the modern wife, if only men will welcome the necessary education which will fit them for this viewpoint. Tony had been unfair to himself in refusing to share the responsibilities of the home, a deeper interpretation of marriage than the prayerbook intimates. He curtailed his own possibilities by his insistence that Blair had attempted the impossible. He still, due to the inadequate measuring stick of the past generations, approved de Musset's description of the ideal wife's

day. "I rise to go to prayers, to the farmyard, to the kitchen. I prepare your meals; I go with you to church; I read a page or two; I sew a while and then I fall asleep happy upon your breast!" Their college associations were important in his eyes only as the means of meeting his wife—not of gauging the woman.

"Local for Pine Top, Storm King Mountain—," began the agent, one eye on his solitary passenger still engaged in an effete effort to damage public property.

Blair recalled herself. She must not think of these things—not until she had visited the children.

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The day of rambles with her son and daughter, helped Blair to keep this resolve. Fifteen minutes after reaching the camp, she had become concerned, with only their reactions and experiences, meeting their friends, helping with mess and finally, lying on a brief cot bed to stare at the stars and glance over in the darkness to where Beatrice slept, realizing that she had a decided tendency to liberal views—and a stunning profile as well! Secretly, Blair admired her son's good-natured teasing of his learned sister. Anthony junior had been assigned the im-

portant duty of camp bugler. He was freckled to the point of being distinguished and could fool the birds when imitating their calls.

Blair was conscious of the children's indifferent attitude regarding their father. They were relieved that he had not come with her. He would be so apt to roar if something went wrong or want to get himself asked to a dinner dance at the nearby hotel. True, he would be generous with pocket money and momentarily affectionate, until he discovered his watch crystal was smashed or he could not get the daily papers. He was as handsome and prosperous a week-end daddy as any of the campers could lay claim to—but they preferred their mother's comradeship. Blair had felt called upon to defend him but she called their attention to the stars, one by one blossoming into the sky, instead. After all—why defend when the children were right?

If there were a separation, she persisted in thinking, as the camp slept and the sky became a chilly, magnificent blue, the children would see him weekly. She shivered at the thought, pretending the night air made her do so. She unrolled another blanket. Then she continued her plans. She would have to assume their support—Tony would be undependable if she coerced him legally—but that was the

least of her difficulties—her business might still be revived, her name was still across the door!

Turning away from the stars, a quick pain shot across her forehead, like the rousing prick of a sword point. She tried to continue her plans. Likely as not, Tony would re-marry some pink and white affair radiant from finishing school. And why not? He must have someone to dazzle. That is another part of glamour's ritual.

She sat upright, her breath became short and frightened. By the starlight, her wrist watch pointed to half after one. Tony needed her! He was in grave danger. After seventeen odd years, their wireless, their holy of holies was forcing her to listen in . . . that other time, Tony had received and answered the call.

The interval of time seemed erased, as a radio-gram seems to eradicate space. Briefly, she re-lived the summer day when she had clung to the ledge of rock, mentally calling for Tony and knowing he would come. There seemed nothing supernatural or forced about that rescue. The result of it was the realization that they belonged to each other for all time. Later, marvelling over the miracle, awed by the proof they had received, they wisely agreed to keep it secret. Now——

Blair had begun folding up the camp blankets, the pain across her forehead vanished. She was answering Tony's distress call. This, too, seemed natural, logical. Even the sleeping camp, the surrounding woods astir with night noises did not imbue her with a feeling of absurdity. An early milk train left the station nearest the camp somewhere about four o'clock. This connected with an express further along—at seven. By this express, she could make the city inside of five hours—a taxi to the house on London Road and she would be with Tony. Not once did she remind herself that Tony was supposed to be in New York, the London Road house locked and unoccupied.

Neither had Tony, years ago, remembered that Blair was presumably at a picnic, surrounded with friendly protectors. The wireless was never cluttered with picayune details—it knew too exactly.

She dressed rapidly, packing her bag by the aid of a flashlight, writing a note and pinning it on her pillow. In it, she told Beatrice some hasty, emphatic excuse of having forgotten an important business appointment in the city; she would return and explain more fully later but it was imperative she leave at once.

Like a burglar, she stole away. The milk train

stopped at the station half a mile off. She was uncertain as to the way, for when she arrived they had driven to meet her. But she did not doubt her ability to find the path as her feet tripped over branches and snapped twigs with surprising noises. She walked on and on—the wireless guided as well as called.

As she waited for the train, the wireless gave no further signals. She was dominated by the same driving, silent force which dominated Tony as he plunged along the rough road of the Maine woods. Not once did she doubt but what she would be in time, the wireless never miscalculated.

When the astonished trainmen took her aboard she had no realization of what she said to explain this unusual journey. The express train, too, was late but Blair comforted herself that the wireless must have taken this into consideration. She was almost calm as she secured space in the parlor car and settled herself for the five hour run.

As she watched the telegraph poles and fence corners swell into towns and the towns combine into city outskirts, the thought came to her that she had every right to be optimistic as to the outcome of her errand. Tony needed her as she needed him because they were balance wheels, complements, each,

per se, incomplete. Only together could they form a successful enduring partnership. She began considering the virtues and vices, estimating her calmness as against Tony's excitability, her economy versus Tony's extravagance which could result in a common-sense generosity. His matter of fact viewpoint benefited from Blair's imagination, as did his egotism and her inclination to morbid self-abasement. They belonged to each other intellectually as well. There flashed across her mind the memory of undergraduate days, when they worked in partnership on the advertising contest, the success of which had won Tony his position with Carson and Scott. Then she became dismayed at recalling what seemed a long-ago lark in the face of possible tragedy— Until the station was called, her mind-state was that of suspended animation. She would neither wonder nor estimate—she would wait.

The taxi man who drove her to London Road had often driven her before. He began chatting about the humid temperature, the abundance of tourists this season.

"I took Mr. Judd out home last night," he volunteered, as they turned in the drive, "guess he didn't know when your train got in or he'd have been down to meet you."

The pain across her forehead returned for an instant. She paid the man generously and left him to his own conclusions. So had Mr. Judd! The man left with the conviction that nice people were often queer and if the world ever knew all that transpired in the suburbs—well, it would know quite a handful!

Blair took her latch key to unlock the door. Glancing at the wooden shutters, her gaze wandered upwards to a hall window opened half its length, the curtains streaming out untidily. The heat suddenly oppressed her. She felt weak, as if she would sink down when the door yielded to the key.

Then she breathed in the dark, stale atmosphere of the hall. Tony's wraps and train literature lay carelessly on the carved bench. Here, the wireless ceased its illuminating guidance.

An upstairs door banged. She knew it to be the door of Tony's den. She darted towards the stairs, reaching the top landing in time to hear him give a stifled cry. Then she re-opened the door. In a comprehending glance, she realized why she had come.

Endless papers and tape-tied bundles of documents were strewn over his desk. The shades were drawn, a picture of the children and herself, taken

for some long-ago holiday, had been snatched off the wall and then flung face downward on top of this débris—in the tenseness of the moment. Blair recognized the frame.

Fully dressed, sitting behind the desk, his head bent in an attitude of shamed defeat, was Tony. He started up at the sound of her step but uttered no word of surprise or resentment. In his blood-shot, tired eyes, Blair read his cheap intention, emphasized by his frantic hand which held a gun.

He was no longer the pompous man of affairs but a desperate human being broken by his efforts to seek the "big stuff." Tony had proceeded on the old fallacy that every square deal is entitled to have four sharp corners but he had never taken into consideration what might lurk around any one of the same.

"Tell me from the very first," Blair ordered simply. The tension vanished, as she took the gun. He felt safe, just as Blair had felt when he lifted her from the rock ledge.

"Why did you come here?" he asked, almost fearful of her answer.

"The wireless—our wireless. I knew I would be in time just as I knew we belonged to each other, we must never think otherwise. It seems as simple

as it is stupendous; real forces do. Only imitations have the complex veneer. Now tell me—everything.”

“Our wireless,” with a hoarse cry. Tony buried his head on Blair’s shoulder, “if it was that—you are right—we belong—we can begin again. Begin together.” He struggled for brief, illuminating phrases. “The morning papers—seen them?”

“No.”

His unsteady left hand pulled to view the sensational report exposing Oliver Sterling’s bucketing of orders, followed by his unmoved admittance of how, while carrying over four hundred thousand dollars in liabilities, he offset the deficit by trading against customers, selling “short” against their purchases. Taking the trend of a client’s order as a barometer, he had expected the market to go down when a customer bought, whereas the customer expected the reverse. Therefore, when ordered to buy certain stocks, he promptly sold short in the same stock. The market continuing to rise, customers demanded stock profits and there had been neither money nor securities with which to pay them. Although Sterling moved to New York to give the impression of being allied with metropolitan interests, his customers had been from the

various states in the Union. He had maintained branch offices in small cities and citizens of these states, through the New York district attorney, had demanded an explanation of Sterling and his mythical partners of whom he boasted. There had been no partners; neither had he betrayed anxiety or remorse at his own misdeeds. He owed everyone and for everything. His wife, a charming hostess at a fashionable resort, had been reported as prostrated at this denouncement. She had, without delay, stated she would in no way stand by her husband or shield him. Sterling had then shot himself through the heart.

Blair read the story from long-distance range. When she finished, she looked down at Tony's head pressed tightly against her shoulder.

"Are you the same?"

"No—not quite. But I helped him in his damned thieving without knowing I did. I believed he was as square as it is possible to be—and make his sort of money. I didn't know how much raw stuff he had pulled. He fooled me as well as his customers—but who would believe me? Only you! I thought him a plunger but not a burglar. I took the chances he told me—I played into his hands. He traded on my reputation while I thought myself

favorable by his recommendations—it has been faintly distinct to me for weeks—but I couldn't see any way out unless I made a killing that would wipe out every obligation or unless I turned evidence. . . . I've been unable to pin him down, to get any satisfaction. Nothing bothered him except when his wife declared herself! Then he did what I was going to do—got out of the mess and left someone else to clear it up! Don't you hate me? Think what it would have meant if—if you hadn't come . . . I can make good everything but it leaves me flat. We'd have to begin without as much as we had at Twilldo—without that youth and ambition that you only value when you have wasted it. Oh, I've done a remarkable job—trying to keep my wife home! Well—I don't expect you to stand by—it was not your fault—let me go adrift——”

“This house is Twon'tdo,” she announced clearly. Tony lifted his head to listen. “I wonder why we never thought of naming it before. It is Twon'tdo. We've each had a try at not accepting our personal universe—but we can't refuse again. We are duty bound to fall into step. I cannot dash away from you, neither can you pace ahead and fancy. I'll creep contentedly behind. The first time the wireless worked, it was in the matter of

physical danger. This time it involves spiritual destiny. Fine sounding words, Tony—but very simple, after all. Briefly, you must grow up, want a wife instead of a combination mother-and-sweet-heart. Forgive my brusqueness, but this is no time for more drama,” her eyes straying to the laid-aside gun.

“Please go on,” he said somewhat disinterestedly.

“You must realize a husband should be the esoteric help a wife usually is, it is often the attitude men assume towards the women, who ask for logical sequence in their interests, which determine whether or not that request can be granted. We must have sequence if we are to avoid nervous wrecks, universal discontent. We must not ask for more than a fraction of outside interests because we must find contentment in giving the greater part to the home. You men must reverse the formula—and follow it. Until this modern understanding is brought to pass, women will impulsively abandon their great career of wife and motherhood and let civilization take the consequences.”

“Would you favor that?” Tony asked, as if personal problems were nonexistent.

“Better the wreckage of unfair conditions and a new and just reconstruction than to continue with

the handicap of indifference, ridicule, oppression. Everything is relative—I am not expecting others to meet or approve our individual needs. But what is the use of women going on with formal education unless men have not only tolerance and sympathy but a keen desire to see us demonstrate what we have acquired? The old definition of home and home life has changed—whether we like or approve it. Why not co-operate in finding the best interpretation of the modern definition? As for ourselves, I'm not minding this as some would—it is all a part of finding what we ought to be to each other—so was Twilldo and the White Elephant and the Bungahigh and Headquarters—and now, Twon'tdo! We can begin again—together. We have never once been what we should."

"You say this of man and wife?" he asked."

"Exactly. Man and wife instead of man and woman! We have been Judd and wife most of the time, Judd and Norcross some of it. For an interval, it was Norcross and Judd. Don't you believe it ought to be Judd and Judd?"

"I'm afraid I do," he said sincerely. "Just as I tried not to believe it." He held her in his arms. "All right, Blair, you've outlined our platform. My part will be to hold you to it." He squared his

shoulders as if to surrender without reservation.

"It is Judd & Judd."

Blair sank down at the disordered desk, her hands gathering in a wild confusion of papers. "I have to handle something—or I'll cry," she said incoherently, "by and by, I'll be able to sit still and we can plan."

"You'll still be my lovely?" he was unable to help the clumsy repetition of what was still nearest his heart, "perhaps I'm dazed or you may have been vague—but you'll still be the little mother—at home sometimes?"

"I shall still be all that—and more," she promised, shuffling the papers together as if they were mammoth playing cards. "I don't ask for a severe office schedule. I could not endure under it and keep the home, too. But I want to be a welcome person when I assert myself as your partner, I want to be vital in the business as you must be vital at home with the children. Oh, we're not out of the woods, yet," she added wisely, "after this emotional crisis has ended and we've cleared up debts and retrenched and stood for criticism and rude questions and found out the few real friends we can call our own—then will come the test."

"What test?" he asked, sitting on the arm of her chair, lifting off her hat and stroking her brown hair. "Can there be any more than now?"

"Perhaps no more—but as much," she insisted. "Then will come the time of realizing all you have agreed to—all I have undertaken. You will have moments of regret that you conceded under the heat of an emotional strain. I will have moments of self-pity that I did not seize this opportunity to blaze the trail for only myself. You will question my ability, I will disagree with your judgment—we will not react the same to some of the children's problems, I have been accustomed to judging them so long. But we will meet the test," she ended. "Oh, I am sure of it."

"And I am ready to be proven."

"Do you know what our emotion will be, when this has come about?"

"No," Tony swept the gun back into the drawer, as if ashamed to even look at his contemplated madness. "Despite your warnings, I am ready to believe what you tell me. Later on, I may contradict—but not now," their lips met in an understanding kiss before she answered.

"It will be a more enduring emotion than triumph or self-preservation," she spoke with the swiftness

of one who is sure, "it will be an impersonal joy for the victory over man's blind pessimism and women's hysterical protests—a victory possible for every Judd and Judd, if only they have faith!"

THE END

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